

**Global GDR? Sovereignty, Legitimacy and Decolonization in
the German Democratic Republic, 1960–1989**

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I, George Bodie, confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where
information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been
indicated in the thesis.

Abstract

In the two decades following its demise, the GDR—in both historical and popular representation—was largely depicted as an isolated, autarchic entity. A recent wave of research into the global Cold War has begun to challenge this assertion, highlighting the GDR’s links to the extra-European world. Such perspectives nevertheless retain some of the older tropes of the isolationist narrative, viewing the GDR’s engagement with these countries through the narrow lens of a search for legitimacy among its own population. This thesis seeks to expand the scope, viewing the GDR’s relations with what was viewed as a “proto-socialist” world in Africa, Asia and Latin America not a simplistic, historically-fixed policy directed toward a domestic audience, but rather as part of an active political project to reshape global relations. GDR elites viewed their state as fundamentally unviable without international integration: once the project for a united Germany was abandoned in the 1960s, the GDR’s global ambitions took on paramount importance. Rather than an attempt to build legitimacy, this turn was rather imagined through the lens of sovereignty; legitimacy was not a concept in GDR elite’s political arsenal, but they did worry about their nation’s sovereignty, and sought to buttress it through engagement with the proto-socialist world. This thesis examines such engagement from five different vantage-points: looking at how the ideological basis for the project was constructed by foreign policy elites; how the GDR sought to create foreign adherents to the project through educational exchange; how the proto-socialist world—specifically Cuba—became a site for socialist leisure; how citizens engaged with domestic solidarity campaigns which sought to turn them into active participants in the project; and how the proto-socialist world was depicted on television. In doing so, it will show how early hopes for a global socialist world in the 1960s metamorphized as the

Cold War progressed, fragmenting into an archipelagic network of increasingly isolated states by the 1980s.

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Introduction

Yes, it is certain that tomorrow, today's maps will be outdated. Because where there is no socialism today, there will be socialism tomorrow.

Der Sozialismus—deine Welt, book given to GDR citizens after the Jugendweihe, a coming-of-age ceremony.¹

Three images serve to introduce the argument and content of this thesis. In the first, Lothar Zitzmann's painting, *Weltjugendlied*, a mass of figures appears to be literally interconnected: some hold hands or other's heads, and their limbs are intertwined. In the centre, the figures form a column, and appear to be striving in the same direction across the canvas, from left to right. Presented in Berlin's Palace of the Republic in 1976, the painting was part of a permanent exhibition entitled *Dürfen Kommunisten träumen*, or "are communists allowed to dream?" In the often blunt, explicitly propagandistic world of GDR art, the phrase stands out by virtue of its self-reflexive tone: the original proposed title, "The Fight and Victory of Socialism" was a piece of more conventional rhetoric, but was rejected by some of the artists involved.²

Zitzmann's painting was an expression of a grand ideal. In contrast, the second image expresses an everyday reality. A 1977 photograph from a grocery shop in East Berlin shows two portraits nestled among everyday food items. In between jars of *Bockwurst*

¹ Eberhard Heinrich, "Die Karte zeigt, wohin sich die Erde bewegt," in *Der Sozialismus, deine Welt* (Berlin: Verlag Neues Leben, 1975), 30.

² Monika Flocke, Auftrag: Kunst 1949-1990. *Bildende Künstler in der DDR zwischen Ästhetik und Politik. Katalog zur Ausstellung des Deutschen Historischen Museums 1995*. (Munich: Klinkhardt & Biermann, 1995), 245.

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and mustard stand portraits of Erich Honecker, General Secretary of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany, and Joachim Yhombi-Opango, the head of state of the Marxist-Leninist People's Republic of the Congo. Yhombi-Opango's rule would not last long after the photo was taken: he was deposed in 1979.³ But when he travelled to East Berlin two years earlier, Honecker assured him that he was a household name. "In our country," he told the Congolese leader, "it is very well known how much the People's Republic of the Congo is doing for the final liberation of the African Continent from colonialism and racism."⁴

³ John Frank Clark and Samuel Decalo, *Historical Dictionary of Republic of the Congo* (Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 2012), 349.

⁴ Stiftung Archiv der Parteien und Massenorganisationen der ehemaligen DDR in Bundesarchiv, (Hereafter SAPMO-BArch), DY 30/2459, "Toast des Generalsekretärs des ZK der SED und Vorsitzenden des Staatsrates der DDR, Erich Honecker," 31.



Figure 1: Detail from Lothar Zitzmann's Weltjugendlied 1975. Author's image.

These two pictures embody the two key contentions of this thesis. In both academic literature and popular culture, the GDR has been presented an inward-looking, nationally-bounded project. This depiction grew from the very real restrictions—on humans, ideas, and objects—that the state placed or attempted to place on cross-border exchange. Understanding the extent to which the GDR existed as a restrictive, border-enforcing entity is an important task, one that has been taken up with enthusiasm by historians. But as a singular focus without other perspectives, this thesis will argue that it cannot fully capture the GDR as a historical project, nor everyday life within the state in its fullest dimensions. The GDR was often an isolated state, in many respects one for which the adjective “closed” was apposite. But at the same time, it was also a state that was understood by its elites as a fundamentally global project. As such, these elites sought to bind the GDR to trans- and international structures, forging deep relationships

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with other states, most notably those which emerged from the collapse of the European empires in the latter half of the twentieth century. Trapped between a hostile Western Europe and a dysfunctional socialist bloc, GDR elites articulated a notion of sovereignty that privileged the necessity of global socialist cooperation, and eventually, convergence.

As a part of this global project, these elites imagined the extra-European world as a “proto-socialist” world, in which socialism would develop and lead to international



Figure 2: Erich Honecker and Joachim Yhombi-Opango, East Berlin, 1977. Archiv

Bundesstiftung Aufarbeitung, Fotobestand Harald Schmitt.

convergence within a global socialist world-system. To the communists who ruled the GDR and set its political and cultural agenda this was an existential issue, not a sideshow for the more important aim of domestic legitimacy. The importance of these connections and the agit-propagandist nature of GDR cultural production meant that the proto-socialist world entered everyday life in a myriad of ways. The political project of Marxism-Leninism involved shaping a new, socialist humanity; in the GDR this new socialist human was imagined in her new global context as a conscious exponent of this new political project, both politically and culturally.

The orientation to the proto-socialist world changed over time. This thesis will show how decolonisation in Africa combined with an abandonment of hopes for a unified

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Germany, leading GDR elites to orientate themselves to an idea of socialist globalization that saw the rest of the globe as being on an objectively defined development path that skewed toward socialism. These dreams were rooted in thinking that revolved around sovereignty: the GDR, like its western neighbour the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG), was a rump state fashioned out of the occupation zone of an invading foreign army and it did not receive formal sovereignty until 1955, nor global recognition of its borders until over twenty years after its establishment. Unsurprisingly then, sovereignty played a key role in the global ideas of GDR elites, who developed a global conception of shared sovereignty, whereby the different individual member states of the socialist world system were theorised as being on a path toward a post-national, unified humanity. A specific, Marxist-Leninist conception of development was highly important to this notion too. As the socialist states developed through stages of socialism, postcolonial states had a choice to pick socialist or capitalist development “paths.” Theorists in the GDR believed that postcolonial states were objectively inclined toward the former and that the globe would thus inevitably see a growth of socialist states that would join the socialist world system, sharing sovereignty with the GDR and the other socialist nations of the bloc. These grand world-historical ideas permeated everyday life in the GDR, altering them profoundly. This was a global vision that was expansive and optimistic while retaining a suspicion of the imperialist pockets within the proto-socialist world: it was thus archipelagic. Over time, as this vision failed to come to fruition, the socialist archipelago shifted from being viewed as an expansive constellation of forces to a network of increasingly isolated states. As the world became more globalised and complex, the ability to clearly distinguish between imperialist and anti-imperialist forces became more and more difficult, too.

Zitzmann’s painting is the perfect visual accompaniment to the global dreams of the GDR’s elite who, as the inheritors of a fragile, confined and subordinate state, turned to dreams of global revolution in order to imagine a prosperous, sovereign future. While

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in the GDR's early years this manifested as a desire for a united communist Germany, the hardening of inter-German divisions and the shock of decolonisation in the early 1960s led these elites to believe that they were entering what Politburo member Hermann Axen would later call a "new revolutionary moment."⁵ The states produced by this new revolutionary moment were not simply potential allies for the socialist world, but rather viewed, as a Soviet academic wrote at the time, as "an inseparable part of the world revolutionary process."⁶ In inclination, they were "objectively anti-imperialist." As Axen later remembered, it was viewed that the former colonial states, once a "reserve of strength" for the colonial powers, would become the same thing for socialist world: "This was bound up with the expectation that these countries, or at least a portion of them, would develop toward socialism. The revolutionary developments in these countries were supported not only for their anti-imperialist, anti-colonial orientation but also because one believed that in these countries, despite their low development levels, a socialist course was possible."⁷ As such, the GDR of the 1960s and 1970s steered itself toward this revolutionary moment, producing a chain of ties to revolutionary and nationalist movements which would shape the state's fate, as well as everyday life for its citizens.

Zitzmann's epic depiction of a unified humanity moving together to a better future through struggle, sacrifice, setbacks and obstacles, illustrated this dream of socialist internationalism. The dream, in turn, promised the continued existence of the GDR as a viable, prosperous state. This had quotidian consequences. Grand ideas regarding the proto-socialist world were ubiquitous in the GDR: in supermarkets, on TV screens, in

⁵ Hermann Axen and Harald Neubert, *Ich war ein Diener der Partei: autobiographische Gespräche mit Harald Neubert*, Rote Reihe (Berlin: Edition Ost, 1996), 400.

⁶ Both quoted cited in Roger E. Kanet, "Soviet Propaganda and the Process of National Liberation," in *The Soviet Union, Eastern Europe and the Third World*, ed. Roger E. Kanet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 91.

⁷ Axen and Neubert, *Ich war ein Diener der Partei*, 399.

newspapers. Whether or not it was true that GDR citizens were aware of Congolese efforts to liberate Africa, as Honecker had told Yhombi-Opango, they would have been aware of his face when they did their grocery shopping. Honecker would go on to tell Yhombi-Opango that he was not the only African leader to feature as a part of everyday life in the GDR, noting that streets and buildings in the country had recently been named after Patrice Lumumba, Amilcar Cabral and another Congolese Marxist, Marien N'gouabi.⁸

The proto-socialist world thus came to have a deep relationship with power in the GDR, both symbolically but also practically. A third image serves to illustrate this relationship. On April 16th 1981, following Honecker's re-election as General Secretary of the SED, the *Neues Deutschland* carried messages of support from international leaders on its pages, clearly intended to be read as confirmation of the GDR's place in an international constellation of power. Alongside messages from the Soviet Union and GDR citizens, the paper featured seven pages of messages from the foreign leaders of communist parties: 26 of these were from the proto-socialist world, while only five came from the capitalist world, and none from the nations of the Warsaw Pact.

All countries in the bloc, of course, practiced socialist internationalism in some shape or form. But the GDR's relationship to the proto-socialist world bore a specific relationship to sovereignty that is difficult to find elsewhere. In Hungary, for example, a similar culture emerged in response to decolonisation. The Hungarian variant, however, lasted only until the mid-1970s and was much more limited in its aims, seeking to "inspire a commitment to socialism among a new generation and build an outward-looking socialist patriotism," according to James Mark and Péter Apor.⁹ The GDR's

⁸ *ibid.*, p.33

⁹ James Mark and Péter Apor, "Socialism Goes Global: Decolonization and the Making of a New Culture of Internationalism in Socialist Hungary, 1956–1989," *The Journal of Modern History*, 87, no. 4 (December 1, 2015): 891.

Wir verwirklichen eine historische Mission

Rede von Aboubakar K. B. G., Botschafter der Demokratischen Volksrepublik Guinea in der DDR

Die Republik und der gesamte Völkern und Völkern... (transcription of the speech text)



Unbeirrter Kampf für Aufbau neuer Ordnung

Rede von Pierre N. S., Mitglied des Politbüros der Kongolischen Partei der Arbeit

Die Republik und der gesamte Völkern... (transcription of the speech text)



Eure Errungenschaften Quelle unserer Kraft

Rede von Peter Muehlhage, Mitglied des Politbüros und Sekretär für Internationale Verbindungen der FDJ der Sozialistischen Einheitspartei Deutschlands

Die Republik und der gesamte Völkern... (transcription of the speech text)



Rassisten verstärken ständig ihre Aggression

Rede von Abba D. Jatta, Mitglied der Politischen Kommission für Afrikanische Unabhängigkeitskämpfer der Kominform, Präsident der Nationalen Volksversammlung

Die Republik und der gesamte Völkern... (transcription of the speech text)



Macht und Waffen sind in des Volkes Händen

Rede von Ahmad Z. El M. I., Mitglied des Generalsekretariats des Allgemeinen Volkskongresses der Sozialistischen Libanesischen Arbeiter-Volkspartei

Die Republik und der gesamte Völkern... (transcription of the speech text)



Nahostproblem gerecht und dauerhaft regeln

Rede von Dr. Issam Khamis El M., Leiter der Vertretung der Palästinensischen Befreiungsorganisation in der DDR

Die Republik und der gesamte Völkern... (transcription of the speech text)



Figure 3: Neues Deutschland, April 16th 1981, 12

orientation toward the proto-socialist world outlasted even the Soviet Union's. Within the socialist bloc, two maverick exceptions exist in Albania and Romania, although both cases—open defiance of the Soviet Union in favour of Maoist China in the case of Albania, and a deliberate policy of ambiguity of alignment in the case of Romania—represent a form of ideological divergence and power politics.¹⁰ The GDR's orientation to the proto-socialist world involved neither significant ideological divergence nor questioning of the supremacy of the Soviet Union. It was driven, above all, by the GDR's status as a rump state. Competition with the FRG was an existential issue for the elites

¹⁰ On Romania, see Robin Alison Remington, "Romania: Boundary Disintegration between East and South," in *The Soviet Bloc And The Third World: The Political Economy Of East-South Relations*, ed. Brigitte Schulz and William W. Hansen (London: Routledge, 2019); For Albania, see Elidor Mëhilli, *From Stalin to Mao: Albania and the Socialist World* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2017), 187–226.

of the GDR, and this transformed priorities. As Sigrid Meuschel has argued, ideology in the GDR took on a particularly important function in contrast to other states in the bloc, where parties were able to present themselves as “emergency protection” against Soviet hegemony, something not open to the SED because of the existence of West Germany.¹¹

“Direct your eyes / toward what exists today / and imagine the opposite”:

The GDR in Global History

What contribution can a study of the GDR make to global history? Conversely, as Mattias Middell has asked, what could global history possibly have to do with the GDR, “an extremely small state on the Western edge of the Soviet glaxis, limited in its sovereignty, exhibiting a bounded temporal existence rooted in the Cold War?”¹² Taking these questions as a starting point, this thesis contests two related narratives in the literature and wider historical understanding of the GDR; which I will call the autarchic narrative and the legitimacy paradox respectively. In doing so, it aims to add a further dimension to our understanding of both elite conceptions of rule and state-society relations in the GDR by investigating them from a global perspective, borrowing from Sebastien Conrad’s definition of global history as a methodology which “pursue[s]

¹¹ Meuschel argues that in other states in the bloc, parties were able to present themselves as “emergency protection” against Soviet hegemony, something not open to the SED because of the existence of West Germany. Sigrid Meuschel, *Legitimation und Parteiherrschaft: Zum Paradox von Stabilität und Revolution in der DDR 1945-1989*, Erstaussgabe (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1991), 20.

¹² Matthias Middell, “Weltgeschichte DDR,” in *Die DDR als Chance: neue Perspektiven auf ein altes Thema*, ed. Ulrich Mählert (Berlin: Metropol, 2016), 149.

the problem of causation up to the global level.”¹³ For Conrad, the historical discipline has been beset by two “birth defects”: methodological nationalism and Eurocentrism.¹⁴ Both of these birth defects, I will argue, are evidenced by the autarchy narrative and the legitimacy paradox. This is not global history in the multi-archival, multi-continental sense. Rather I seek to examine the GDR in light of its place in the world; how its elites imagined global processes and orientated the state toward them, and how this orientation filtered down into state-society relations. Following Charles Bright and Michael Geyer, I thus seek to illuminate the GDR within what they call the “global condition...in which globality prove[s] the tangible context of action, of political decisions and social practice, for all.”¹⁵

The first narrative is the somewhat outdated but nevertheless persistent notion that the GDR was deliberately autarchic: a state that chose isolation, and thus contributed little to global history and for which the tools of global history are of little use.¹⁶ The

¹³ Sebastian Conrad, *What Is Global History?* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016), 67.

¹⁴ *ibid.*, 3

¹⁵ Charles Bright and Michael Geyer, “Benchmarks of Globalization,” in *A Companion to World History* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 290.

¹⁶ See for example a number of scholars who have presented the GDR as an edifice built to resist the forces of the “world market”: Charles S. Maier, *Dissolution: The Crisis of Communism and the End of East Germany* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), 104; Gareth Dale, *Between State Capitalism and Globalisation: The Collapse of the East German Economy* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2004), 340; Olaf Klenke, *Ist die DDR an der Globalisierung gescheitert?: Autarke Wirtschaftspolitik versus internationale Weltwirtschaft; das Beispiel Mikroelektronik* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2001), 111; Christoph Buchheim, “Die Achillesferse der DDR - der Aussenhandel,” in *Überholen ohne einzuholen: die DDR-Wirtschaft als Fußnote der deutschen Geschichte?*, ed. André Steiner, Forschungen zur DDR-Gesellschaft (Berlin: Ch. Links Verlag, 2006), 91; Peter Grieder, *The German Democratic Republic* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012); No state in the world has ever been completely autarchic, of course. Some scholars have acknowledged that state-socialist countries traded with the rest of the world, although still argue for autarchy—or at least “near-autarchy”—on the basis that these states didn’t take part in “outward-orientated developmental strategy” or “international specialization.” See for example: Jan Winiecki, *Shortcut or Piecemeal: Economic Development Strategies and Structural Change* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2016), 24.

symbolic importance of the Berlin Wall has played a significant role in this narrative and it is certainly not surprising that a state which restricted the movement of millions of its own citizens so forcefully would be described as isolated or autarchic. Much of the isolationist narrative was constructed in the 1990s and early 2000s, when the concept of globalization was reaching its zenith: the collapse of the socialist bloc was followed by what one author has called a “quantum leap in globalisation” which appeared to have been precipitated by the bloc’s disappearance.¹⁷ For a long time then, the GDR and its state-socialist cousins in the Eastern bloc were thus viewed as an antonym to globalising forces. The GDR was a “walled-in” society, one author wrote.¹⁸ The overarching metaphor of the revolutions of 1989 was therefore a movement from a “closed” society to an “open” one.¹⁹

Such depictions, both popular and scholarly, are closely tied to the once dominant totalitarianism school of GDR historiography. While very few scholars would deny that the GDR was a repressive, authoritarian state, scholars belonging to the totalitarian school view the state’s subsuming of society in the GDR to be total, and defined by exclusive recourse to repressive means.²⁰ Such arguments have given rise to metaphors

¹⁷ Jan Pronk, “Collateral Damage or Calculated Default? The Millennium Development Goals and the Politics of Globalisation,” in *Globalisation, Poverty and Conflict: A Critical “Development” Reader*, ed. Max Spoor (New York: Springer Science & Business Media, 2006), 26; Going further, Justin Rosenberg has argued that the very prominence of globalization theory itself depended upon an illusion that the global ‘interconnectedness’ that followed the collapse of the Soviet Union was a permanent, epochal change, rather than a temporary condition caused by the ‘vacuum’ it left behind. Justin Rosenberg, “Globalization Theory: A Post Mortem,” *International Politics* 42, no. 1 (March 1, 2005): 2-74.

¹⁸ Thomas Lindenberger, “Diktatur der Grenze (n). Die eingemauerte Gesellschaft und ihre Feinde,” in *Mauerbau und Mauerfall: Ursachen, Verlauf, Auswirkungen*, ed. Hans-Hermann Hertle, Konrad Hugo Jarausch, and Christoph Klessmann (Berlin: Ch. Links Verlag, 2002).

¹⁹ Vladimir Tismaneanu, “The Revolutions of 1989: Causes, Meanings, Consequences,” *Contemporary European History* 18, no. 3 (2009): 277.

²⁰ For an instructive example, see Klaus Schroeder, *Der SED-Staat: Geschichte und Strukturen der DDR 1949-1990*, 3rd ed. (Köln: Böhlau, 2013); On the “repression thesis” and the totalitarianism school, see Mary Fulbrook, “Histories and Memories: Verklärung or

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which emphasise, as we have seen, a “closing,” “walling-in,” or “homogenization” of society, metaphors which lend themselves easily to narratives of autarchy or isolation.²¹

“The GDR was a regime of walls,” one notable proponent of the totalitarian thesis has written. In 1989, suddenly, “it was as if animals who had spent their lives within a zoo...suddenly found the ditches filled and the cages open.”²²

The GDR’s short-lived policy of *Störfreimachung* has often been held up as evidence of this “regime of walls,” illustrating the GDR’s autarchic intent.²³ Meaning literally “making free from disruption,” the policy was enacted in December 1960 with the intention of insulating the GDR from damaging foreign intervention by ending trade with the FRG, following reports that had suggested alarming dependencies in key areas of supply. On the surface, *Störfreimachung* appears as a classic case of autarchic policy making, but closer inspection reveals inadequacies in this understanding. The first issue is that rather than replacing trade with the FRG through increased domestic production—as one would expect from an autarchic policy—trade instead moved East, with the same supplies being sought from countries belonging to the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance, or COMECON.²⁴ If the act of seeking new trading partners due to political differences with existing ones is evidence of autarchy, then the list of autarchic states one could draw up would be extensive. Acknowledging this, some scholars have

Erklärung?,” in *Remembering the German Democratic Republic: Divided Memory in a United Germany*, ed. David Clarke and Ute Wölfel (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 91.

²¹ As Fulbrook puts it, perhaps the arch metaphor suggested by this thesis is that of society as a homogenous “pot,” held in by a “repressive lid”: Mary Fulbrook, *The People’s State: East German Society from Hitler to Honecker* (London: Yale University Press, 2005).

²² Maier, *Dissolution*, 56.

²³ See for example Eli Rubin, *Synthetic Socialism: Plastics and Dictatorship in the German Democratic Republic* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 41.

²⁴ Jörg Roesler, *Momente deutsch-deutscher Wirtschafts- und Sozialgeschichte 1945 bis 1990: eine Analyse auf gleicher Augenhöhe* (Leipzig: Leipziger Universitätsverlag, 2006), 123.

argued that instead, the socialist world instituted a form of “group autarchy.”²⁵ Beyond the internally contradictory nature of this label (how many trading partners are required for “group autarchy” to become “openness” to the world market?) group autarchy does not seem an apt way to describe COMECON, which failed to create either a functional division of labour among its member states, or self-sufficiency, with states regularly making bilateral deals with both ‘First’ and ‘Second’ World nations.²⁶ A second issue with the autarchic premise associated with *Störfreimachung* is that the policy was quickly acknowledged by the same elites who instituted it to be untenable, abruptly being cancelled just two years after its announcement.²⁷ The GDR continued trading with the capitalist world, often grudgingly, throughout its existence. While the leaders of the GDR often attempted to insulate themselves from what they viewed as negative FRG influence, they sought to replace these connections with other, friendly states. Delineation from the FRG did not mean delineation from the world. Furthermore, even when they *did* attempt to insulate their state from capitalist trade and influence, these attempts were acknowledged to have been unsuccessful by their own adherents. Perhaps most damning of the autarchic narrative is the GDR’s exports to GDP ratio: 40 percent in 1989, 11 percent larger than the FRG’s, and comparable to that of contemporary Australia.²⁸

²⁵ See Joerg Roesler, “Wirtschaftspolitik der DDR - Autarkie versus internationale Arbeitsteilung,” *Dresdener Beiträge zur Geschichte der Technikwissenschaften* 25 (1998): 2–14. Roesler does correctly identify that much of the GDR’s supposed autarchy was an economic imposition rather than political choice.

²⁶ Jozef M. van Brabant, *Socialist Economic Integration: Aspects of Contemporary Economic Problems in Eastern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 133.

²⁷ Roesler, *Momente deutsch-deutscher Wirtschafts- und Sozialgeschichte 1945 bis 1990*, 123.

²⁸ Gerlinde Sinn and Hans-Werner Sinn, *Jumpstart: The Economic Unification of Germany* (Boston: MIT Press, 1994), 37; For contemporary figures, see “Trade (% of GDP) | Data,” accessed July 10, 2019, https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NE.TRD.GNFS.ZS?most_recent_value_desc=false.

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In the past decade, as will see in the next section, this methodological nationalism has been challenged by scholars who have begun to investigate the GDR's global ties as part of a wider shift in Cold War historiography—and the historical discipline more broadly—toward more expansive frameworks of study. The image of an autarchic GDR nevertheless remains pervasive, and prominent German historian Hans-Ulrich Wehler spoke for many when he described the GDR as a mere “footnote in world history” in a 2008 monograph,²⁹ further cementing an earlier statement from Konrad Jarausch, who claimed that the GDR would not be “central point of reference” for any new histories of globalization.³⁰ The long shadow cast by such notions has led to recent calls for historians to do more to understand the GDR in terms of “border crossing, transregional and transnational discourses, research projects, and representations,”³¹ or carry out research that examines “Eastern [German] patterns of globalization,”³² or the impact that solidarity culture had on the lived experience of the GDR.³³

While it is true that the GDR was conditioned by shifting degrees of economic and political isolation throughout its existence, autarchy was neither a political reality nor an ideal for its ruling elite. Rather, as a state, the GDR exhibited a curious combination of internationalism and seclusion, entirely dependent upon outside forces for survival while fiercely guarding against other outside forces which were deemed a threat. The

²⁹ Hans-Ulrich Wehler, *Deutsche Gesellschaftsgeschichte: Bundesrepublik und DDR*, vol. 5 (Munich: C.H.Beck, 2008), 361.

³⁰ Cited in Detlev Brunner, “DDR „transnational“. Die „internationale Solidarität“ der DDR,” in *Deutsche Zeitgeschichte - transnational*, ed. Alexander Gallus, Axel Schildt, and Detlef Siegfried (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2015), 65.

³¹ Jürgen Kocka, “Grenzüberschreitung als Chance: Überlegungen zur Zukunft der DDR-Forschung” in *Die DDR als Chance: neue Perspektiven auf ein altes Thema* edited by Ulrich Mählert. (Berlin: Metropol, 2016), 133.

³² Matthias Middell, “Weltgeschichte DDR.” In *Die DDR als Chance: neue Perspektiven auf ein altes Thema*, edited by Ulrich Mählert. (Berlin: Metropol, 2016), 150.

³³ Detlev Brunner, “DDR „transnational“. Die „internationale Solidarität“ der DDR,” in *Deutsche Zeitgeschichte - transnational*, ed. Alexander Gallus, Axel Schildt, and Detlef Siegfried (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2015), 80.

former, the socialist camp and its would-be allies in the “objectively anti-imperialist” world, were seen as a tonic for the GDR’s ailments, the latter, the imperialist world, a constant source of malady. Was this combination of attitudes to the outside world a contradiction? Paradox has been central to scholarly work on the GDR since its collapse, becoming a central theme for scholars who have sought to explain the GDR’s apparently paradoxical combination of stability and fragility. This approach was encapsulated in the work of Detlef Pollack, who in 1998 proposed seven “constitutive contradictions” which were to be understood as “destructive” and “unavoidable” fault lines which, if kept out of view, allowed for the GDR to appear as stable state.³⁴ Dictatorship is a widely accepted premise in GDR scholarship, but it has been given a number of contradictory epithets: “welfare,”³⁵ “participatory,”³⁶ “comfortable,”³⁷ “educational,”³⁸ “consensus,”³⁹ and “social security,”⁴⁰ to name just a few. The GDR was an authoritarian state, Peter Ludz found, but its authoritarianism was of the “consultative” variety;⁴¹ even its ostensible totalitarianism, according to Peter Grieder, emanated from the “bottom up.”⁴²

³⁴ Detlef Pollack, “Die Konstitutive Widersprüchlichkeit Der DDR. Oder: War Die DDR-Gesellschaft Homogen?,” *Geschichte Und Gesellschaft* 24, no. 1 (1998): 110–31.

³⁵ Konrad Jarausch, “Care and Coercion: The GDR as Welfare Dictatorship,” in *Dictatorship as Experience: Towards a Socio-Cultural History of the GDR*, ed. Konrad Jarausch (New York: Berghahn Books, 1999), 47.

³⁶ Fulbrook, *The People’s State*.

³⁷ Günter Grass, *Ein weites Feld: Roman* (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1997), 56.

³⁸ Hermann Glaser, *Deutsche Kultur 1945-2000* (Munich: Ullstein Taschenbuch, 2000), 343.

³⁹ Martin Sabrow, “Der Konkurs der Konsensdiktatur: Überlegungen zum inneren Zerfall der DDR aus kulturgeschichtlicher Perspektive,” in *Weg in den Untergang: Der innere Zerfall der DDR*, ed. Konrad Hugo Jarausch and Martin Sabrow (Berlin: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1999), 83–118.

⁴⁰ Beatrix Bouvier, *Die DDR - ein Sozialstaat?: Sozialpolitik in der Ära Honecker* (Bonn: Dietz Nachf., 2002).

⁴¹ Peter C. Ludz, *The Changing Party Elite in East Germany* (Boston: MIT Press, 1972), 42.

⁴² Grieder, *The German Democratic Republic*.

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Are we to understand global visions in the GDR with similar recourse to contradiction? This thesis proposes focusing, instead, on the distinctions between reality and intention. As a utopian imaginary, communism often stood in stark contrast to contemporary reality, sometimes explicitly so; as a character in Peter Hacks' 1962 play *die Sorgen und die Macht* claimed, communism was a dream carried in opposition to the present, "in empty bags": "In my empty bag / I carry the fullness of the world, the communism / into which we are moving, and in a / not so distant year / ... Comrades, if you would like to envisage / this communism, then direct your eyes / toward what exists today / and imagine the opposite."⁴³ The political reality of isolation, then, is not to be confused with political will. Indeed, it was the very reality of isolation that drove GDR elites to imagine its opposite: a unified, socialist globe, and forcefully attempt to make this dream a reality.

As a state the GDR aggressively sought transnational, regional, and global integration with non-capitalist states (and was often forced, grudgingly, to establish links to the very same capitalist states). The socialist world, had, of course, always seen international revolution as a prerequisite for the full flourishing of communism. Stalinism's concept of "socialism in one country" is often depicted as heralding an end to genuine internationalism, but this was neither true at the time, nor did subsequent changes in policy under Khrushchev or Brezhnev see it completely abandoned. Indeed, as late as 1979, Molotov could still speak of its necessity: "Without international revolution," he claimed, "neither the Soviet Union nor any other [socialist] country can triumph. Without international revolution no one can triumph. We have to increase the number of our friends."⁴⁴ For the GDR, forced into perpetual competition with a stronger,

⁴³ Stefan Wolle, *Die heile Welt der Diktatur: Alltag und Herrschaft in der DDR 1971-1989* (Berlin: Links Christoph Verlag, 2013), 23.

⁴⁴ Quoted in Jonathan Haslam, *Russia's Cold War: From the October Revolution to the Fall of the Wall* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), 1.

alternative German state, this need for friends was even stronger than that of the Soviet Union. In theory this need was to be filled by regional cooperation between socialist states. Both the archival record and wider literature, as we will see, show that GDR elites consistently pushed for further integration. But the ideal of socialist convergence remained that: an ideal, not a reality.

The building of the wall in August 1961 is often taken by historians as the moment the GDR's borders were "sealed."⁴⁵ But the so-called "inner-German" border was only one of the GDR's three land borders, and the borders to the East—with Poland and Czechoslovakia—were, as Dominik Trutowski has shown, seen in a very different light: as a display of "collective thought" and the "difference destroying" socialist state community. As Trutowski illustrates, despite these lofty aims and the institution of visa-free travel across this border in the 1970s—rescinded following political crisis in Poland at the turn of the 1980s—the ideal of convergence never truly surmounted political reality.⁴⁶ The GDR and the Eastern bloc, were, in many ways, discordant neighbours.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ See the use of this exact phrase, for example, in Mark Allinson, *Politics and Popular Opinion in East Germany, 1945-68* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), 119.

⁴⁶ Dominik Trutowski, *Der geteilte Ostblock: Die Grenzen der SBZ/DDR zu Polen und der Tschechoslowakei* (Köln: Böhlau Köln, 2011).

⁴⁷ It is common argument that the GDR was the formal realisation of a long existing propensity toward authoritarianism in the German speaking areas East of the Elbe, better suited to alignment with an intrinsically authoritarian East as opposed to the West. James Hawes' popular history of Germany a recent example of this argument: James Hawes, *The Shortest History of Germany* (Devon: Old Street Publishing, 2017). Such a line of thought might have been present in the minds of those in power in the immediate postwar era. Many historians have painted the Cold War division of Europe as being driven by a desire to cast a problematic "Prussian east"—in the form of the GDR—away from the European concert of nations and into forced alignment with like-minded anti-democratic states around it, freeing West Germany to coexist with its neighbours as part of new democratic European order. Tony Judt, for example, is one of many who argued that Konrad Adenauer was happy to abandon the east in favour of closer ties to the more "historically familiar lands to the West." Tony Judt, "Why the Cold War Worked," *New York Review of Books*, October 9, 1997. In reality, however, those who came to rule the states of the Eastern Bloc were brought together by subservience to Moscow, and little else.

The GDR in the new Cold War History and the “Legitimacy Paradox”

Alongside the totalitarianism school, older narratives regarding an autarchic GDR have been widely challenged in recent years as part of a broader shift in the historiography of the Cold War, which has seen a renewed focus on connections between the socialist bloc and the nations of Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Odd Arne Westad’s 2005 *The Global Cold War*, with its oft-cited claim that “the most important aspects of the Cold War were neither military nor strategic, nor Europe-centred, but connected to political and social development in the Third World,”⁴⁸ was arguably the spark that lit the fuse, and in the years that followed, a wave of new research has explored the interrelationships between the socialist bloc and the “Third World,” decolonization, and globalization.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 396

⁴⁹ Some early forays into the field include David C. Engerman, “The Second World’s Third World,” *Kritika* 12, no. 1 (January 1, 2011); Mark and Apor, “Socialism Goes Global”; Piero Gleijeses, *Conflicting Missions: Havana, Washington, and Africa, 1959-1976*, New edition edition (Chapel Hill, N.C. London: The University of North Carolina Press, 2003); Tobias Rupperecht, *Soviet Internationalism after Stalin: Interaction and Exchange between the USSR and Latin America during the Cold War*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015); Several entries in the 2017 Cambridge History of Communism were examples of this new perspective: Artemy M. Kalinovsky, “The Soviet Union and the Global Cold War,” in *The Cambridge History of Communism: Volume 3: Endgames? Late Communism in Global Perspective, 1968 to the Present*, ed. Juliane Fürst, Mark Selden, and Silvio Pons, vol. 3, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 50-71; Piero Gleijeses, “Marxist Revolutions and Regimes in Latin America and Africa in the 1970s,” in *The Cambridge History of Communism: Volume 3: Endgames? Late Communism in Global Perspective, 1968 to the Present*, ed. Juliane Fürst, Mark Selden, and Silvio Pons, vol. 3 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 72-94; James Mark and Tobias Rupperecht, “Europe’s ‘1989’ in Global Context,” in *The Cambridge History of Communism: Volume 3: Endgames? Late Communism in Global Perspective, 1968 to the Present*, ed. Juliane Fürst, Mark Selden, and Silvio Pons, vol. 3 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 203-23; Celia Donert, “Feminism, Communism and Global Socialism: Encounters and Entanglements,” in *The Cambridge History of Communism: Volume 3: Endgames? Late Communism in Global Perspective, 1968 to the Present*, ed. Juliane Fürst, Mark Selden, and Silvio Pons, vol. 3 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 376-98; Andreas Hilger, “Communism, Decolonization and the Third World,” in *The Cambridge History of Communism: Volume 2: The Socialist Camp and World Power 1941-1960s*, ed. Norman Naimark, Silvio Pons, and Sophie Quinn-Judge, vol. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 317-40; Sara Lorenzini, “The Socialist Camp and the Challenge of Economic Modernization in the Third

This focus has had a number of knock-on effects for other areas of literature. The socialist world's involvement in global anti-apartheid struggles have been the subject of increased study;⁵⁰ as the literature on the Sino-Soviet split shifted toward a focus on ideological rather than power-political causes, Jeremy Friedman has illustrated the importance of this ideological split to politics in the postcolonial world;⁵¹ Oscar Sanchez-Sibony's provocative take on the—in his eyes, subordinate—role played by the Soviet Union in the global economy has incited new thinking on the global economic history of the Cold War;⁵² researchers have begun to question previous assumptions regarding the passivity of the “non-Soviet Warsaw Pact countries,” or NSWP, with regard to their own relations to the extra-European world.⁵³ This is not a new area of study in the strictest sense: socialist bloc relations with the “Third World” were well covered by

World,” in *The Cambridge History of Communism: Volume 2*, ed. Norman Naimark, Silvio Pons, and Sophie Quinn-Judge (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017); See also a couple of entries in 2018's Oxford Handbook on decolonization: Piero Gleijeses, “Decolonization and the Cold War,” in *The Oxford Handbook of the Ends of Empire*, ed. Martin Thomas and Andrew Thompson, Oxford Handbooks (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018); James Mark and Quinn Slobodian, “Eastern Europe in the Global History of Decolonization,” in *The Oxford Handbook of the Ends of Empire*, ed. Martin Thomas and Andrew S. Thompson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).

⁵⁰ Paul Betts et al., “Race, Socialism and Solidarity: Anti-Apartheid in Eastern Europe,” in *A Global History of Anti-Apartheid: “Forward to Freedom” in South Africa*, ed. Anna Konieczna and Rob Skinner (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2019), 151–200; Piero Gleijeses, *Visions of Freedom: Havana, Washington, Pretoria, and the Struggle for Southern Africa, 1976-1991* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2016).

⁵¹ Lorenz Luthi's work is an example of the shift toward ideology as a causal factor in the split. Lorenz M. Lüthi, *The Sino-Soviet Split: Cold War in the Communist World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008); Jeremy Friedman, *Shadow Cold War: The Sino-Soviet Competition for the Third World* (Chapel Hill: University North Carolina Press, 2015).

⁵² Oscar Sanchez-Sibony, *Red Globalization: The Political Economy of the Soviet Cold War from Stalin to Khrushchev* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014); For an alternative approach see Yakov Feygin, “Reforming The Cold War State: Economic Thought, Internationalization, And The Politics Of Soviet Reform, 1955-1985.” (Ph.D. diss., University of Pennsylvania, 2017).

⁵³ Much of this research has been buttressed by Laurien Crumps ground-breaking work on the Warsaw Pact: Laurien Crump, *The Warsaw Pact Reconsidered: International Relations in Eastern Europe, 1955-1969* (London: Routledge, 2015); For a recent example, see Natalia Telepneva and Philip Muehlenbeck, eds., *Warsaw Pact Intervention in the Third World: Aid and Influence in the Cold War* (London: I.B.Tauris, 2018).

historians and political scientists before 1989.⁵⁴ But the opening of the archives in the 1990s has fundamentally shifted the discipline: whereas earlier works rely on state publications and the public pronouncements of socialist leaders, today these sources can be buttressed with archival research.

The archives of the former GDR are the most accessible, well-catalogued, and extensive of any of the former socialist world. Ease of archival access is thus one reason why the GDR is probably the most studied NSWP country with regard to its international relations, but it is not the only one. Scholars have long been interested in the ways in which inter-German competition spilled out across the globe.⁵⁵ Before the recent wave of scholarship, a number of studies focusing on GDR relations with Africa, Asia and Latin America were produced by former GDR functionaries themselves.⁵⁶ While such texts provided illuminating insights, they were often driven by a desire to exculpate the GDR in a historical sense, limiting their analytical value. A new, global

⁵⁴ For some illustrative examples see Elizabeth Kridl Valkenier, *The Soviet Union and the Third World: An Economic Bind* (New York: Praeger, 1983); Peter Wiles, ed., *The New Communist Third World: An Essay in Political Economy* (London: Croom Helm, 1982).

⁵⁵ See pre-Wende texts by Hans-Joachim Spanger and Lothar Brock, *Die beiden deutschen Staaten in der Dritten Welt: Die Entwicklungspolitik der DDR - eine Herausforderung für die Bundesrepublik Deutschland?* (Opladen: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 1987); or Ernst Hillebrand, *Das Afrika-Engagement Der DDR* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1987); Gareth Winrow's study of GDR Afrikapolitik had the misfortune of being completed months before the archives opened, but nevertheless remains a helpful overview. Gareth M. Winrow, *The Foreign Policy of the GDR in Africa*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

⁵⁶ See for example Ilona Schleicher, *Die DDR Im Südlichen Afrika: Solidarität Und Kalter Krieg* (Hamburg: Institut für Afrika-Kunde, 1997); Ulf Engel and Hans-Georg Schleicher, *Die Beiden Deutschen Staaten in Afrika: Zwischen Konkurrenz Und Koexistenz, 1949-1990* (Hamburg: Institut für Afrika-Kunde im Verbund der Stiftung Deutsches Übersee-Institut, 1998); Ulrich van der Heyden, ed., *Engagiert für Afrika: die DDR und Afrika II* (Münster: LIT Verlag, 1994); Thomas Kunze, ed., *Ostalgie international: Erinnerungen an die DDR von Nicaragua bis Vietnam* (Berlin: Links, 2010).

focus has thus given new life to a historical subject viewed by some scholars as “researched out” [ausgeforscht].⁵⁷

Much of this new research has taken hard-earned lessons from more domestic-based literature and applied it to these transnational encounters. Take, for example, the pioneering work of Mary Fulbrook and her many adherents, who have challenged the well-established totalitarianism school of GDR historians to illustrate GDR citizens’ involvement in and influence upon the state.⁵⁸ Alongside the introduction of Alf Lüdtke’s concept of *Eigen-Sinn* to state-society relations in the GDR,⁵⁹ scholars have, for example, examined the practice of imported labour in the form of *Vertragsarbeiter* or contract workers who came to the GDR from Cuba, Mozambique, Vietnam or Angola in the 1970s and 1980s, emphasising their agency within what were often strict conditions of state control.⁶⁰ An important edited collection by Quinn Slobodian has taken up the self-consciously paradoxical aim of “undermining the myth of East German provincialism...precisely by provincializing East Germany.”⁶¹ And texts by William

⁵⁷ The phrase is Thomas Lindenberger’s, cited in Dierk Hoffman, Michael Schwartz, and Hermann Wentker, “Die DDR als Chance: Desiderate und Perspektiven künftiger Forschung,” in *Die DDR als Chance*, ed. Ulrich Mählert, 1st ed. (Berlin: Metropol-Verlag, 2016), 24.

⁵⁸ See Fulbrook, *The People’s State*; A notable adherent is Corey Ross, see Cory Ross, *Constructing Socialism at the Grass-Roots: The Transformation of East Germany, 1945-65* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000).

⁵⁹ On *Eigen-Sinn*, see Alf Lüdtke, “What Happened to the ‘Fiery Red Glow’? Workers’ Experiences and German Fascism,” in *The History of Everyday Life: Reconstructing Historical Experiences and Ways of Life*, ed. Alf Lüdtke (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018), 227.

⁶⁰ The work of Marcia Schenck, who has interviewed former contract workers in Angola and Mozambique, is notable here. See Marcia C. Schenck, “A Chronology of Nostalgia: Memories of Former Angolan and Mozambican Worker Trainees to East Germany,” *Labor History* 59, no. 3 (May 4, 2018): 352-74; See also Damian Henry Tone Mac Con Uladh, “Guests of the Socialist Nation? Foreign Students and Workers in the GDR, 1949-1990.” (Ph.D. diss., University College London, 2005).

⁶¹ Quinn Slobodian, ed., *Comrades of Color: East Germany in the Cold War World* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2015).

Glenn Gray and Young-Sun Hong have highlighted the global dimensions of inter-German competition in the diplomatic and humanitarian spheres.⁶²

Much has been gained in our understanding of the GDR from this growth of literature. Such links nevertheless retain some of the older tropes of the isolationist narrative, viewing the GDR's engagement with these countries through the narrow lens of a search for legitimacy among its own population, rather than seeing it as an active political project, an approach which falls into what I will call "the legitimacy paradox." This trope is almost ubiquitous. Gerd Horten, for example, has made the case for a "Vietnam bonus" in the GDR in the 1970s, arguing that the GDR's support for the winning side of the Vietnam War can be seen as an important stabilising factor for the GDR in the Honecker era.⁶³ Similar arguments have been applied to GDR support for anti-apartheid movements: a multi-authored piece recently described it as a means of undermining the legitimacy of West Germany while simultaneously building it for the GDR.⁶⁴ In an influential article on GDR support for Namibian liberation movement SWAPO, Toni Weis has cast the argument in more nuanced terms: according to Weis, solidarity was "an important tool" in the GDR used primarily to boost "image both at home and abroad."⁶⁵ Legitimacy, while not the original driving force for co-operation, came to dominate: "the reasons for continuing co-operation were often different from the reasons that led to co-operation in the first place. The GDR certainly did not support

⁶² William Glenn Gray, *Germany's Cold War: The Global Campaign to Isolate East Germany, 1949-1969* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003); Young-Sun Hong, *Cold War Germany, the Third World, and the Global Humanitarian Regime*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015); For an example of the older literature on the topic, see Rüdiger Marco Booz, *Hallsteinzeit: Deutsche Aussenpolitik 1955-1972* (Bonn: Bouvier, 1995).

⁶³ Gerd Horten, "Sailing in the Shadow of the Vietnam War: The GDR Government and the 'Vietnam Bonus' of the Early 1970s," *German Studies Review* 36, no. 3 (2013): 557-78.

⁶⁴ Betts et al., "Race, Socialism and Solidarity," 161-62.

⁶⁵ Toni Weis, "The Politics Machine: On the Concept of 'Solidarity' in East German Support for SWAPO," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 37, no. 2 (June 1, 2011): 362.

SWAPO purely for reasons of its public relations image, but their partnership was unlikely to become as extensive and long-lasting without this positive side effect.”⁶⁶

Such arguments build upon a wide literature which focuses on the legitimation of the state in the GDR, a focus that has come to be almost omnipresent in GDR studies. Legitimation has been presented as the driving force behind economic planning⁶⁷, the promotion of the works of Brecht⁶⁸, even the content of rock music lyrics in the GDR.⁶⁹ The preponderance of the concept is in large part thanks to West German sociologist Sigrid Meuschel’s influential 1992 book *Legitimation und Parteiherrschaft*, which argued for an *Entdifferenzierung* in GDR society by the state, meaning literally a “de-differentiation” but usually translated as homogenization. For Meuschel, anti-fascism was the fuel which lent the SED the legitimacy it needed to subsume society. As numerous other scholars have shown, in the early years of the GDR anti-fascism existed as a relatively successful form of self-identification for citizen and state.⁷⁰ This was fundamentally tied up with inter-German competition, with the FRG’s real and imagined National Socialist continuities repeatedly emphasised in GDR propaganda. The anti-fascist myth, as both Catherine Epstein and Josie McLellan have noted however, waned over time.⁷¹ Meuschel argues that during the Honecker era anti-fascism was replaced

⁶⁶ *ibid.*, p.366

⁶⁷ Peter C. Caldwell, “Plan Als Legitimationsmittel, Planung Als Problem: Die DDR Als Beispiel Staatssozialistischer Modernität,” *Geschichte Und Gesellschaft* 34, no. 3 (2008): 360-74.

⁶⁸ David Bathrick, “The Dialectics of Legitimation: Brecht in the GDR,” *New German Critique*, no. 2 (1974): 90-103.

⁶⁹ Edward Larkey, “GDR Rock Goes West: Finding a Voice in the West German Market,” *German Politics & Society* 23, no. 4 (77) (2005): 45-68.

⁷⁰ See, for example Benita Blessing, *The Antifascist Classroom* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

⁷¹ Catherine Epstein, *The Last Revolutionaries: German Communists and Their Century* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), 213; More specifically, McLellan argues that the “narrowly defined” state narrative of antifascism was contested by second-generation writers in the 1970s and 1980s, who developed their own competing accounts of antifascist history,

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with a focus on the ultimately less successful principals of “material equality and social security.”⁷²

Numerous factors led to the weakening of the power of the antifascist mythology in the 1960s. Generational dynamics were in part responsible, as a generation of GDR citizens who hadn’t experienced Nazism or the chaos of the war years came into adulthood. But the move away from the demand for German unification toward so-called *Abgrenzung*, meaning demarcation or delineation, in the Honecker era, concurrent with the rise of notion of the GDR as a “German nation of socialist character,” meant that it was no longer as important to emphasize the fascist credentials of the FRG, which had become a “foreign country.”⁷³ The supposedly fascistic nature of the FRG remained an important component of the GDR’s efforts to win over the proto-socialist world, as we will see, but as a domestic practice, anti-fascism was geared primarily toward the project of socialist German unification. As this idea receded, so too did anti-fascism.

It is important to stress that the thesis here is not that one sort of “legitimizing” ideology—anti-fascism—was replaced by another in socialist internationalism. Anti-fascism never went away.⁷⁴ Instead, the argument is that as GDR elites turned away from the project of a united Germany and began to look further afield for the means of solidifying sovereignty, anti-fascism declined in importance and was joined by socialist

drawing on non-SED mandated sources. *Antifascism and Memory in East Germany: Remembering the International Brigades, 1945-1989* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 201-2.

⁷² Meuschel, *Legitimation und Parteiherrschaft*, 222.

⁷³ Claire Sutherland, *Soldered States: Nation-Building in Germany and Vietnam* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010), 59.

⁷⁴ Epstein argues that in the 1960s Ulbricht’s New Economic Policy led to the promotion of technocrats into positions previously held by former so-called “Veteran Communists”—those who had joined the KPD in pre-war Germany—many of whom switched focus to memorializing their antifascist past. These efforts at memorialization ran into difficulty, often struggling to cohere to the SED’s official histories of antifascism. Epstein, *The Last Revolutionaries*, 187-214.

internationalism as a focal point of GDR propaganda. Importantly, however, since the GDR's orientation to the proto-socialist world was a political project, not simply a legitimising "tactic," it wasn't always popular. As we will see, it generated a wealth of opposition and difficulty for the state, which went to great length and expense to attempt to convince its citizens that such an orientation was necessary; it was rather the opposite of an easy win.

Numerous features of that orientation support this argument. GDR citizens were often not made aware of the extent of GDR solidarity campaigns with the proto-socialist world. The fact that the GDR clandestinely manufactured North Vietnam's banknotes and coins for over a decade is one of many examples of this secrecy.⁷⁵ Perhaps most damning, however, is the timeline of events. Much of the emphasis on legitimacy derives from the GDR's very real deficit of international recognition in the 1950s and 1960s. The West German Hallstein Doctrine, established in 1955, prescribed that the Federal Republic would not establish or maintain diplomatic relations with any state that recognized its German rival. As Rüdiger Marco Booz has shown, it was remarkably successful in isolating the GDR, which only managed to establish formal relations with one country, Cuba, between the years 1957 and 1969.⁷⁶ But with détente, *Ostpolitik* and the eventual admission of both German states to the United Nations in 1973, this international crisis of legitimacy evaporated and the GDR received a flurry of international recognitions.

Herein lies the paradox. If legitimacy was the driving force of the GDR's orientation toward the proto-socialist world, then one would expect a lessening of international activity in the years following its entrance to the UN. "With the admission of both

⁷⁵ Bernd Schaefer, "Socialist Modernization in Vietnam: The East German Approach, 1976-89," in *Comrades of Color: East Germany in the Cold War World*, ed. Quinn Slobodian (New York: Berghahn Books, 2015), 103.

⁷⁶ Booz, *Hallsteinzeit*, 170.

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German states to the United Nations in 1973,” writes Sebastian Gehrig for example, “the German-German competition over international legal legitimacy returned to a focus on the domestic political systems of both states.”⁷⁷ As this thesis will show, however, such a return to domestic focus did not occur. Instead, GDR engagement with the proto-socialist world *grew*, and as we will see, was at its strongest immediately after the GDR’s entering the UN. It drew back only at the end of the 1970s, when concerns regarding the solvency of the GDR combined with a loss of faith regarding the prospects for socialism in the proto-socialist world. In both an domestic and international sense, the mid-1970s have been acknowledged by historians as the GDR’s most stable period.⁷⁸ A feeling on behalf of East German elites that the sovereignty of the GDR was “tethered” to transnational ties led them to strengthen these ties whenever they could, but this was driven by a recognition of a global condition of interconnectivity, not as a short-term fix for national sovereignty. Thus, a sense of domestic security in the GDR led to *stronger* transnational engagement rather than a retreat into isolation.

What explains this paradox? Why did the GDR, at its most “legitimate” moment, so drastically increase its activities in the proto-socialist world? In his history of the Hallstein Doctrine, William Glenn Gray claims that once the GDR’s isolation was broken, “the quest for formal recognition graduated into a more nebulous pursuit of international renown as a model socialist society,” largely as a result of “Honecker’s craving for respect.”⁷⁹ But can a project of this scale and depth be reduced to the personal whims

⁷⁷ Sebastian Gehrig, “Reaching Out to the Third World: East Germany’s Anti-Apartheid and Socialist Human Rights Campaign,” *German History* 36, no. 4 (November 14, 2018): 595.

⁷⁸ For example, Mark Allison has described 1977 as the GDR’s “most normal year,” with one of the reasons being this new-found optimism regarding the GDR’s international position. Mark Allison, “1977: The GDR’s Most Normal Year?,” in *Power And Society In The GDR, 1961-1979: The “Normalisation of Rule”?*, ed. Mary Fulbrook (London: Berghahn Books, 2013), 254; Similarly, Gerd Horten cites a number of authors who have all claimed that the mid-1970s were the GDR’s most stable: Horten, “Sailing in the Shadow of the Vietnam War,” 574.

⁷⁹ Glenn Gray, *Germany’s Cold War*, 220.

of the GDR's leader? What explains its expansion? Was Honecker's desire for respect stronger than the GDR's need for diplomatic recognition? It is undoubtedly true that Honecker enjoyed the image of prestige that socialist internationalism carried with it, especially in the mid-1970s, when Marxism-Leninism appeared at its zenith: but does symbolism capture the breadth and depth of the project, or provide a convincing causal argument for its existence?

While the confluence of national sovereignty and transnational engagement might appear paradoxical, closer inspection may well establish it as a historical norm. As Mark Hewitson has argued in the case of the *Kaiserreich*, for example "the more powerful the German nation state became, the more it became entangled in a web of relations beyond national borders."⁸⁰ It is more likely, however, that the issue lies with the notion of legitimacy itself. Indeed, this thesis will argue that in order to understand the GDR's global engagements, we must dispense with the notion of legitimacy as a helpful means of analysis altogether. There is no doubt that relations between the GDR and the proto-socialist world were coloured to a certain degree by a politics of representation which sought to present the regime as being on the right side of history. But did communist elites believe in the idea of legitimacy? Did they believe that Marxist-Leninist states suffered from something they would have recognised as a "legitimacy deficit"? How can the concept of legitimacy serve historical analysis, to paraphrase Charles Maier, "if the possibility of force is never renounced and organised opposition is never sanctioned"?⁸¹

Legitimacy, a concept most clearly developed within the traditions of political liberalism and representative democracy, did not feature as part of the political lexicon

⁸⁰ Mark Hewitson, *Germany and the Modern World, 1880-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 3.

⁸¹ Maier, *Dissolution*, 52.

of GDR elites.⁸² Instead, these elites imagined both their place in the world and the GDR's precarious global position through the lens of sovereignty. Since in Marxist-Leninist theory the dictatorship of the proletariat was legitimate on its own terms, the only thing that could topple communist power was the forces of reaction. Legitimacy was normative and a zero-sum game: a state was legitimate if it represented the advance guard of the working class. States, as Lenin had claimed, were merely reflections of the class composition of power in any given society; those that represented the working class were legitimate, and those that represented the bourgeoisie or feudal ruling classes were not.⁸³ In the international system, however, states could be more or less sovereign: more or less capable of reproducing their own power. This sovereignty was imagined as a state's capacity to pursue its objectives, and was also seen to emanate from, rather than be diminished by, transnational cooperation.⁸⁴ It is thus, I argue, only by attempting to understand GDR elites' conceptions of the ebbs and flows of global events as opposed to a congealed, unshifting attempt to build domestic legitimacy that we can begin to grapple with the importance of the GDR's orientation to the proto-socialist world.

What was the Proto-Socialist World?

⁸² John Rawls is probably the most notable exponent of the liberal notion of legitimacy. See John Rawls, *Political Liberalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005).

⁸³ Most clearly in V. I. Lenin, *State and Revolution* (Mansfield: Martino Fine Books, 2011).

⁸⁴ Interestingly, this placed GDR theorists in the company of many postmodern scholars. The idea that sovereignty should be imagined primarily as capacity, and that it is dependent on transnational cooperation is articulated by David Held for example. See David Held, "Law of States, Law of Peoples: Three Models of Sovereignty," *Legal Theory* 8, no. 1 (March 2002): 1-44.

Just as the “Third World,” Vijay Prishad reminds us, was a project, not a place, so too was the GDR’s imagined proto-socialist world.⁸⁵ Although GDR officials did not use this term, the terminology they did use to describe these states—“young national states,” “developing countries,” “nations on a non-capitalist development path”—evinced their belief that they were on a linear path toward socialism. Coining a phrase to describe those states which didn’t clearly fit into either camp of the Cold War binary is a notoriously difficult undertaking. Once grouped according to membership of either NATO or the Warsaw Pact, there remain one hundred other nations spanning six continents. Some, such as Cuba or Australia, would clearly be associated with particular sides of the Cold War despite not being members of each organisation. What common associations are shared between European countries which adopted formal neutrality, such as Austria or Finland, and those who gained independence at the height of the Cold War, such as Ghana or Vietnam? In his ground-breaking study of the global Cold War, Odd-Arne Westad justified using the term “Third World” on the basis that “the concept also implied a distinct position in Cold War terms, the refusal to be ruled by the superpowers and their ideologies.”⁸⁶ But Finland or Austria were never in the Third World, just as states in Africa, Asia and Latin America which adopted explicitly socialist or even Marxist-Leninist orientations somehow failed to leave it. In 1982, Peter Wiles, Professor of Russian Social and Economic Studies at the University of London, could speak of the “The New Communist Third World,” which included Angola, Ethiopia, Mozambique, and the People’s Republic of Yemen, in addition to the “Third World already within the CMEA” [Council for Mutual Economic Assistance, or COMECON], which included Mongolia and Vietnam.⁸⁷ This notion survived the end of the Cold War:

⁸⁵ Vijay Prashad, *The Darker Nations: A People’s History of the Third World* (New York: New Press, 2008).

⁸⁶ Westad, *The Global Cold War*, 2.

⁸⁷ Wiles, *The New Communist Third World: An Essay in Political Economy*.

an edited volume published in 2001 spoke of Vietnam and Cuba as examples of “Third World Socialism.”⁸⁸

To be in the Third World, then, involved something more than just neutrality. Although the term took on a distinctly pejorative edge toward the end of the Cold War, it was originally intended to carry emancipatory connotations. Alfred Sauvy, the French demographer who coined the phrase in a 1952 article in the left-wing organ *L'Observateur*, had used the tripartite model in order to evoke the Third Estate’s role in the French Revolution; insinuating that the Third World comprised a global majority who would imminently rise up and usher in a new political era.⁸⁹ Sauvy’s revolutionary incantations were taken up by some leading anti-colonial figures. As Franz Fanon—perhaps the most notable of these figures—would write in *The Wretched of the Earth* in 1961, “The Third World ought not to be content to define itself in the terms of values which have preceded it.”⁹⁰ In the 1960s and 1970s the growth of dependency theory helped solidify the notion that there was a singular, meaningful Third World experience.⁹¹ During the same period, “Third Worldism” became an important feature of (West) European and US leftist politics, too.⁹² This positive, politically-minded usage

⁸⁸ C. Brundenius and J. Weeks, eds., *Globalization and Third-World Socialism: Cuba and Vietnam* (New York: Palgrave, 2001).

⁸⁹ Marcin Wojciech Solarz, “‘Third World’: The 60th Anniversary of a Concept That Changed History,” *Third World Quarterly* 33, no. 9 (October 1, 2012): 1562.

⁹⁰ Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington (London: Penguin Classics, 2001), 98.

⁹¹ B. R. Tomlinson, “What Was the Third World?,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 38, no. 2 (2003): 311.

⁹² Scholars have often presented Third Worldism as a purely imagined transnational connection. For an example of such an approach, see Richard Wolin on the influence of Maoism on French intellectuals Richard Wolin, *The Wind from the East: French Intellectuals, the Cultural Revolution, and the Legacy of the 1960s* (Princeton University Press, 2010); Recently, however, scholars have begun to emphasise real world connection in the growth of Third Worldism. In the case of the Federal Republic of Germany, see Quinn Slobodian, *Foreign Front: Third World Politics in Sixties West Germany* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012); For the US context, see Cynthia A. Young, *Soul Power: Culture, Radicalism, And The Making Of A U.S. Third World Left* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006).

of the term was not widespread enough to justify its usage here, however. For one, it was used more by Western scholars and activists than anyone from anywhere within the “Third World” itself. It is striking that while many have described the Bandung Conference of 1955 as the birth of a Third World project,⁹³ the leaders present did not use the term.⁹⁴ Similarly, when many of the same actors met six years later in Belgrade to establish a political movement, they named themselves the Non-Aligned Movement, not the Third World. Three years later the first joint declaration of another important grouping, the Group of 77, chose “developing countries” instead of Third World.⁹⁵

The proto-socialist world was a postcolonial world.⁹⁶ But again, “postcolonial” was not a term used widely until after the *Wende*, and although GDR elites made frequent reference to colonialism, both as a historical legacy and as an ongoing practice in the form of “neo-colonialism,”⁹⁷ they did not speak of a *post*colonial world. By using imperialism instead, the socialist world could emphasise the threat of ongoing colonial domination, and although the subjective attitudes of the proto-socialist leaders could not necessarily be relied upon, they were deemed to be, as state entities, “objectively anti-

⁹³ See for example Christopher J. Lee, “Between a Moment and an Era: The Origins and Afterlives of Bandung,” in *Making a World after Empire: The Bandung Moment and Its Political Afterlives*, ed. Christopher J. Lee (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2010), 15.

⁹⁴ Tomlinson, “What Was the Third World?,” 309.

⁹⁵ “Joint Declaration of the Seventy-Seven Countries” Issued at the End of the First Session of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) in Geneva.,” accessed June 18, 2019, <https://www.g77.org/doc/Joint%20Declaration.html>.

⁹⁶ The obvious exception being Ethiopia, which received huge amounts of support from the socialist world under the Marxist-Leninist leaning leadership of Mengistu Haile Mariam from the late 1970s through to the mid-1980s. Although occupied briefly by Italy in the twentieth century, Ethiopia retained de jure sovereignty during the scramble for Africa. It has nevertheless been defined as experiencing what scholars have called a “cultural colonization.” See for example Messay Kebede, *Radicalism and Cultural Dislocation in Ethiopia, 1960-1974* (Rochester: University Rochester Press, 2008), 45–46.

⁹⁷ A concept borrowed from Kwame Nkrumah: Kwame Nkrumah, *Neo-Colonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism* (London: Panaf Limited, 1974).

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imperialist.”⁹⁸ As Michael Collins has shown, decolonisation was not a singular but rather a “partial and multi-layered process, comprising different elements, causes and consequences,” which “might be said to have a lifespan stretching back to the ancient world.” The postwar decolonization process is distinguishable from what came before it, however, by virtue of its “killing off” of the notion that empires were legitimate political units.⁹⁹ For GDR elites, colonialism—or more precisely, imperialism—was generally undifferentiated, despite the fact that post-war processes of decolonization were fairly heterogenous, encompassing events as varied as the rapid and relatively peaceful handing over of British and French colonies in Africa around the turn of the 1960s (exceptions, of course, existing in the form of Algeria and Kenya), French and Dutch attempts to reoccupy colonies in Asia that had been occupied by Japan during World War Two, and the deferred collapse of the Portuguese empire in the mid-1970s, among others.¹⁰⁰

In the past few decades, the term “global South” has been used to attempt to avoid some of the negative implications of either Third World or “developing world.” This term remains subject to the criticism that it flattens a huge, non-contiguous, and heterogenous space into a false singularity. This study eschews both terms, although not for this reason. As we will see, GDR experts and elites were also guilty of flattening the extra-European world into a false singularity, but in an altogether different manner. Rather, this study will not use these terms (except for in the rare cases they are used by the historical actors concerned), for they are anathema to the actors involved in this story. With regards to the GDR, the term Third World is anachronistic, not being used in

⁹⁸ Donald S. Carlisle, “The Changing Soviet Perception of the Development Process in the Afro-Asian World,” *Midwest Journal of Political Science* 8, no. 4 (1964): 386.

⁹⁹ Michael Collins, “Decolonization,” in *The Encyclopedia of Empire*, ed. John MacKenzie (London: Wiley-Blackwell, 2015), 1.

¹⁰⁰ On the different manifestations of decolonization during the post-war era and its relationship to the Cold War, see Gleijeses, “Decolonization and the Cold War.”

the country until an exceptional scattering of references appeared in the late 1980s. Similarly, “global South,” which came to prominence after the Cold War had ended, is both anachronistic and anachronistic here, as North-South distinctions were (at least officially) strongly rejected by GDR elites.

Both terms carry connotations that wouldn't be recognised by the actors involved in this story and complicate the picture for the reader. Similarly, as we have seen, GDR elites often used explicitly developmentalist terminology to describe the postcolonial world, but for the reader familiar with Western development theory this language is potentially obfuscating; Marxist-Leninist notions of development may have shared common roots and premises with Western variants, but they were also fundamentally opposed in a number of ways.¹⁰¹ As Armando Iandolo writes; “On the surface, Stalin's ‘catch up and overtake’ and Khrushchev's ‘we will bury you’ had the same meaning—the Soviet Union would beat the capitalists at their own game of economic development. However, the Khrushchev leadership maintained that Asian, African, and Latin American countries could obtain the same result, despite their bourgeois nature, if only they adopted the approach to development that came from the USSR.”¹⁰² Sara Lorenzini has shown that the socialist world had, from the late 1950s onwards, laid out a clear path for the proto-socialist world: “nationalization, industrialization and close

¹⁰¹ To take a discrete example in the GDR, development theory in the late 1960s was dominated by the concept of “structure-determining” planning: the idea that by focusing resources on sectors where high-level performance would “determine” levels of growth in the entire economy—such as chemical engineering, electronics, data processing, and automation—rapid “leaps” in growth could be achieved. This non-linear concept of development led to Walter Ulbricht's messianic notion that the GDR could “overtake” the FRG “without catching up.” See André Steiner, *The Plans That Failed: An Economic History of East Germany, 1945-1989* (Oxford: Berghahn, 2010), 119–20.

¹⁰² Alessandro Iandolo, “De-Stalinizing Growth: Decolonization and the Development of Development Economics in the Soviet Union,” in *The Development Century: A Global History*, ed. Stephen J. Macekura and Erez Manela (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 210–11.

relations with the Eastern bloc.”¹⁰³ Nations which did this would thus set themselves along the “non-capitalist development path,” which eventually led to communism, taking a markedly different route to the path prescribed by Western modernization theorists.

A Tethered Sovereignty: the GDR in Europe and in the World

Rather than legitimacy, the GDR’s orientation toward the proto-socialist world was grounded both discursively and ideologically in ideas of sovereignty. It was also rooted in a profound sense of international unease regarding the sovereignty of the state that GDR elites had inherited. These elites saw themselves as operating within a condition of isolation which demanded international cooperation. Alexander Schalck-Golodkowski, an important figure within the GDR’s international trade nexus and head of the shadowy hard-currency procurement agency *Kommerzielle Koordinierung*, [KoKo] would claim after the *Wende* that the GDR was a “de facto part of the Soviet Union” and was “never an independent country.” According to Schalck-Golodkowski, this meant that the GDR required “tethering” to outside forces: “The German economy was terminally ill. It was unviable from the word go. An umbilical cord kept it alive...*Untethered, the GDR would not have seen the light of day.*”¹⁰⁴ Schalck-Golodkowski’s comments require a caveat, for it was common for leading GDR figures—particularly those facing prosecution in newly unified Germany—to absolve themselves of responsibility by denying their independence from the Soviet Union. These statements correlate, however, with those made privately before 1989.

¹⁰³ Lorenzini, “The Socialist Camp and the Challenge of Economic Modernization in the Third World,” 341.

¹⁰⁴ My emphasis, “Das war die DDR” (Mitteldeutscher Rundfunk, 1993).

The GDR's precarity did not necessarily mean a dependence on the Soviet Union. It was typical of GDR leaders to threaten to look elsewhere for help when Soviet support appeared to wane, even for them to use the threat to do so; Erich Honecker frequently used the threat of further trade with West Germany in this regard.¹⁰⁵ But West Germany was, for obvious reasons, a less than ideal trading partner. What the GDR really needed was safe, socialist partners. As SED ideology chief Kurt Hager would say in his memoirs: "The GDR simply did not have the power nor the material or financial resources to cope with the tasks that a modern industrial state sets itself. It was hampered in its ability to integrate into world markets through its exclusion in the Cold War, the high-tech embargo, and the exclusion from credit. Under these conditions, only cooperation with the Soviet Union *or those socialist states which had reached a level of production or consumption comparable with the USA and West Germany* was possible."¹⁰⁶

The GDR's move toward the proto-socialist world only truly began at the beginning of that decade, when the original dream of a united, socialist Germany started to recede.¹⁰⁷ The Berlin crisis erupted in November 1958 with Nikita Khrushchev's ultimatum to the Western powers to withdraw from Berlin within six months, and ended with the building of the wall in August 1961. In that time eighteen new states had come onto the international scene, many of them seemingly sympathetic to the socialist world. It is difficult to imagine that the emergence of the new, proto-socialist world didn't influence a desire on behalf of the both the Soviet and GDR leadership to close a chapter of Cold War conflict in Europe and open up a new one in potentially more

¹⁰⁵ See, for example Jeffrey Kopstein, *The Politics of Economic Decline in East Germany, 1945-1989* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 90-95.

¹⁰⁶ My emphasis, Kurt Hager, *Erinnerungen* (Leipzig: Faber & Faber, 1996), 402-3.

¹⁰⁷ As Hope M. Harrison shows, the building of the Berlin wall was pushed by a scepticism on Walter Ulbricht's part for the hopes for a unified Germany, often in opposition to Soviet desires. Hope M. Harrison, *Driving the Soviets up the Wall: Soviet-East German Relations, 1953-1961* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011).

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fertile ground. The abandonment of the idea of a single German state was completed over the course of the decade; by 1967, the State Secretariat for All-German Affairs was renamed the State Secretariat for West German Affairs, and the new strategic goal of “developed socialism,” inaugurated at the seventh party congress, was articulated in global terms by Walter Ulbricht, who would claim in a speech that year that “socialism is not a short-term, transitional phase in the development of society, but rather a relatively autonomous socio-economic formation within the historical epoch of the shift from capitalism to communism on a global scale.”¹⁰⁸

“The West Germans and the East Germans,” a leading Sovietologist would claim in 1982, “are actually more likely to come to blows because of some events in Mozambique or Zaire...than through an incident on the Elbe.”¹⁰⁹ For the three decades that followed the building of the wall, the intra-German conflict became an inter-German one, moving beyond Europe and maintaining its intensity throughout the vicissitudes of GDR-FRG relations. In his influential two-volume history of Germany, entitled *The Long Road West*, Heinrich August Winkler argued that in order to arrive in the “West,” German leaders had to give up the dream of an pan-European *Reich* and instead take up the ideal of a bounded, democratic, nation state, a destination that was reached with the 1990 unification.¹¹⁰ In Winkler’s narrative, the GDR takes on the appearance of an outlier, neither a “normal” national state like the post-1990 federal republic nor a continuation of the plans for European domination displayed in the post-Bismarck *Kaiserreich* or by the Nazi regime. Instead, the GDR took its cues from the East and

¹⁰⁸ Cited in Heinrich August Winkler, *Germany: The Long Road West: Volume 2: 1933-1990* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 252.

¹⁰⁹ Wiles, *The New Communist Third World: An Essay in Political Economy*, 362.

¹¹⁰ Winkler, *Germany*; A similar argument has recently been made by Kim Christian Priemel, who has shown how the Nuremberg trials constructed a vision of the FRG as a corrupted but ultimately salvageable “Western” nation, as opposed to Asiatic communism in the East. Kim Christian Priemel, *The Betrayal: The Nuremberg Trials and German Divergence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

the South. The Soviet vision of a world community of socialist states was one of these cues. But from the 1960s onward, elites in the GDR pursued a globally-informed vision of sovereignty that placed paramount importance on its connections to the proto-socialist world.

If this vision of shared sovereignty was an outlier in German history, globally speaking it was very much of its time. The post-war era saw a multitude of similar projects which articulated global visions beyond the Westphalian paradigm of singular independent, sovereign statehood. While still upholding the primacy of national sovereignty, these projects viewed sovereignty as being dependent upon trans- or international cooperation.¹¹¹ Thus in the Western part of Europe nation states surrendered sovereignty to the political unit now known as the European Union not, as one prominent historian has noted, as part of a commitment to transcend the nation state, but rather to “rescue” it from collapse.¹¹² Recent research has shown that rather than representing the expansion of Westphalian sovereignty to former colonies, decolonisation rather gave rise to a number of visions that focused on pooling sovereignty. As Martin Thomas and Andrew Thompson have argued, “transnational networks, cross-cultural borrowings, and observed precedents that sustained the forces of anti-colonial nationalism, insurgency, and popular protest were themselves globalising

¹¹¹ The predominance of the notion of Westphalian sovereignty has arguably obscured the existence and success of national movements which favour shared or pooled sovereignty. The break-up of the Habsburg empire in the nineteenth century saw the emergence of multiple such visions, see Dominique Kirchner Reill, *Nationalists Who Feared the Nation: Adriatic Multi-Nationalism in Habsburg Dalmatia, Trieste, and Venice* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012); On the success of partially independent states, see David A. Rezvani, *Surpassing the Sovereign State: The Wealth, Self-Rule, and Security Advantages of Partially Independent Territories* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

¹¹² “the process of European integration...[was] a part of that post-war rescue of the European nation-state, because the new political consensus on which this rescue was built required the process of integration, the surrender of limited areas of national sovereignty to the supranation.” Alan S. Milward, George Brennan, and Federico Romero, *The European Rescue of the Nation-State* (London: Psychology Press, 2000).

factors even if they paved the way for an alternative, late-twentieth century construction of globalisation.”¹¹³ This wasn’t a process limited to postcolonial states: as Michael Collins has shown, decolonisation also led imperial elites to usher in a “federal moment” in an attempt to reform and cling on their empires.¹¹⁴ Recently, Adom Getachew has argued that the decolonisation should above all be seen as a process of “worldmaking,” which “reinvented self-determination reaching beyond its association with the nation to insist that the achievement of this ideal required juridical, political, and economic institutions in the international realm that would secure nondomination.”¹¹⁵

The GDR, of course, did not produce the affinitive ties or global political appeal that could be boasted by the national liberation movements and their attendant *isms*: pan-Africanism, *Négritude*, or pan-Arabism. But importantly, its leaders shared a belief with many across the globe that power (in this case, the power of imperialism) had assumed a new global quality, and this demanded the construction of a global, counter-hegemonic force. This force was imagined above all in the language of sovereignty. And this sovereignty was, by definition, globally bounded: “The sovereignty of socialist states,” the GDR’s political dictionary put it, “is characterised by the international characteristics of the dictatorship of the proletariat, and its practice is carried out upon the basis of proletarian internationalism.” Such a quality was not normative, but was true only for socialist states, because the sovereign form that a state took was defined by its class content; the sovereignty of a capitalist state could only ever be the sovereignty of the

¹¹³ Martin Thomas and Andrew Thompson, “Empire and Globalisation: From ‘High Imperialism’ to Decolonisation,” *The International History Review* 36, no. 1 (January 1, 2014): 142–43; For a case study of this process, see Mathew Connelly’s account of the global ties produced during the Algerian national liberation struggle. Mathew Connelly, *A Diplomatic Revolution: Algeria’s Fight for Independence and the Origins of the Post-Cold War Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003).

¹¹⁴ Michael Collins, “Decolonisation and the ‘Federal Moment,’” *Diplomacy & Statecraft* 24, no. 1 (March 2013): 21–40.

¹¹⁵ Adom Getachew, *Worldmaking after Empire: The Rise and Fall of Self-Determination* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2019), 19.

bourgeoisie. State sovereignty was distinguished from “people’s sovereignty” [Volkssouveränität] the “realisation of the power of a people inside of a state” and “national sovereignty,” which was the right to self-determination—a form of sovereignty which collapsed into state sovereignty once a nation achieved statehood.¹¹⁶ These definitions were undoubtedly part of a recognition of globalization on the part of GDR elites. In a sense they thus articulated a kind of negative cosmopolitanism, not completely removed from the ideas of Ulrich Beck, the theorist of the cosmopolitan state. Under conditions of globalisation, Beck claims, states are forced to switch from “exclusive” to “inclusive” models of sovereignty which give up autonomy in order to “regain their capacity for action and their power to shape events...[and] renew their sovereignty within the frame of world society.”¹¹⁷ The old Westphalian notion of sovereignty is exchanged here for the idea of sovereignty as capacity, which must be transnationally sourced if it is to be effective.

A Transnational Union? The FDGB

A central player in this story is the GDR’s trade union federation, the Freie Deutsche Gewerkschaftsbund, or FDGB. The FDGB’s key role in three of the five chapters of this thesis reflects its ubiquity in the turn to the proto-socialist world. As the largest of the GDR’s “mass organisations” which sought to coordinate social existence in the state, the FDGB played a key role in almost all GDR citizens’ lives. The size and scope of the organisation was immense: as an umbrella union of all trades and industries, it boasted

¹¹⁶ *Kleines Politisches Wörterbuch* (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1973), 745–46.

¹¹⁷ Ulrich Beck, *What Is Globalization?* (London: John Wiley & Sons, 2015), 45.

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9.5 million members in 1986, roughly 95 percent of the working population.¹¹⁸ Beyond sheer size, however, it was the FDGB's social role that made it so important. Stretched across and embedded within society, the FDGB organised the domestic football cup; provided almost half of GDR citizens with their holidays; ran its own university; organised educational meetings in the workplace and set work norms. This expansive role was ordained by Marxist-Leninist theory; since the dictatorship of the proletariat was seen to have removed the antagonism between worker and employer, the purpose of trade unions was seen to have transformed from an antagonistic to a cooperative one: unions thus existed above all to raise productivity.¹¹⁹ Production brigades, organised by the FDGB, acted as the smallest organisational cells within GDR society. Tied to their primary task of raising productivity was an orientation toward collective education as well as cultural engagement.¹²⁰ This was in part due to their omnipresence: since the FDGB was everywhere, it could act as an effective cultural outlet. But the twin drives of cultural uplift and raising productivity were also viewed as interlinked. A committed socialist worker would in theory be a productive worker.

¹¹⁸ As Ulrich Gill notes, membership was technically voluntary, but the negative consequences of not being a members were so strong as to render non-membership exceptionally rare. Ulrich Gill, *FDGB: die DDR-Gewerkschaft von 1945 bis zu ihrer Auflösung 1990* (Cologne: Bund-Verlag, 1991).

¹¹⁹ Detlev Brunner has shown how the FDGB was transformed during the late 1940s into a mass organisation of the SED. For this transformation, the concept of Nurgewerkschaftertum, or "only-trade-unionism," became a label applied to social democrats who sought to maintain the full independence of the trade unions from the state and rejected the explicitly political role Leninists suggested that they play in everyday life. The process of "cleansing" the FDGB of its social democratic membership began at the the Bitterfeld Conference of 1948, where the FDGB formally adopted the Soviet model and announced a "decisive struggle against opportunism" and the Nurgewerkschaftertum, and was completed by the early 1950s. Detlev Brunner, *Der Wandel des FDGB zur kommunistischen Massenorganisation: das Protokoll der Bitterfelder Konferenz des FDGB am 25-26 November 1948* (Essen: Klartext-Verlag, 1996), 8–33.

¹²⁰ Corey Ross, "Staging the East German 'Working Class': Representation and Class Identity in the 'Worker's State,'" in *Representing the German Nation: History and Identity in Twentieth Century Germany*, ed. Mary Fulbrook and Martin Sales (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), 163.

The Leninist model of trade unionism was wedded to the Marxist notion that the establishment of socialism would bring about a subsequent shift in human nature, creating a new, socialist humanity.¹²¹ The FDGB's extent and mission meant that it was central to this project. It carried out various forms of what can be described loosely as pedagogical work. One example of many was its "schools of socialist work" programme, which was introduced in the early 1970s and saw circles of 20 workers, often non-party members, meeting eight times yearly with the aim of familiarising themselves with the basic tenets of Marxism-Leninism and SED policy. These schools were formally voluntary and boasted astounding attendance rates; over 3 million workers having taken part by the early 1980s.¹²²

The FDGB was the principal mediator through which GDR citizens would experience the proto-socialist world and the numerous initiatives directed toward it.

¹²¹ In the Communist Manifesto, Marx and Engels had imagined the dictatorship of the proletariat as a transitional body which "sweeps away by force the old conditions of production" and thus: "the conditions for the existence of class antagonisms and of classes generally...In place of the old bourgeois society...we shall have an association, in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all." Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* (London: The Floating Press, 2009), 45; It is common for scholars to assert that the communist project sought to change an essentialised, enduring notion of human nature, ignoring the fact that Marxism saw human nature as historically contingent. The changing of human nature was secondary to the project of removing the alienation brought about by capitalism. In the Marxist schema, as Marx put it in the Sixth Theses on Feuerbach: the "human essence...is no abstraction inherent in each single individual. In its reality it is the ensemble of the social relations." Karl Marx, "Theses on Feuerbach," in *Karl Marx: Selected Writings*, ed. David McLellan, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 157; While communist pedagogy would attempt to shape a new socialist personality, this was subordinate to and dependant on the removal of the class relation: communist pedagogy was not the instrument that would change human nature, but was to step in once the abolition of private property had done the job. Thus Lenin would note that the generation who grew up in capitalist conditions will "at best" only be able to retain power and lay a firm foundation for "a generation that is starting to work under the new conditions, in a situation in which relations based on the exploitation of man by man no longer exist." V. I. Lenin, "The Tasks of the Youth Leagues," in *V.I. Lenin: Collected Works: April-December 1920*, vol. 31 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1966), 283.

¹²² Gill, *FDGB*, 63; Their actual effect, Renate Hürtgen argues, was more limited, and many workers saw them simply simply as a break from work, participation in which was necessary to gain financial bonuses. Renate Hürtgen, *Zwischen Disziplinierung und Partizipation: Vertrauensleute des FDGB im DDR-Betrieb* (Köln: Böhlau, 2005), 143-50.

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Running from the heights of the Politburo to the smallest organisational cells of society, the FDGB has been described by many commentators, using the Leninist formulation, as a “transmission belt” between state and society. A Leninist metaphor which better captures the FDGB’s ambiguous position, and one more commonly used by FDGB functionaries, is the notion of trade unions as “schools of communism.”¹²³ This metaphor captures the mode of ideological diffusion carried out by the FDGB much more accurately than the mechanistic transmission belt line: like a school, the FDGB was imagined as having a top-down pedagogical function and was supposed to shape personalities. At the same time, the “school of communism,” like a classroom, could also be a site of resistance towards or displacement of ideology. It was also mediated by hierarchy, the diffusion of ideology being complicated by the existence of various levels of bureaucracy within the “school” structure.

The English noun “education” is often translated interchangeably into different German terms, such as *Bildung*, *Unterricht* or *Erziehung*. These terms have subtle differences that are not easily captured by English translations. While *Bildung* has a long and complex history, its modern use refers principally to a process of intellectual improvement tied to enlightenment thinking. More important in the FDGB context were *Unterricht* and *Erziehung*, which were officially prescribed as two distinct spheres. While *Unterricht* referred to the teaching of knowledge, *Erziehung* referred more to the instilling of values, worldviews or morals. Socialist internationalism was a key feature of the worldview that the FDGB sought to instil in its workers. As a member of the

¹²³ Scholars have often conflated these two terms, despite their subtle but important differences. See e.g. Gert-Joachim Glaeßner, *Demokratie und Politik in Deutschland* (Opladen: Leske + Budrich, 2013), 424; and Rainer Weinert and Franz-Otto Gilles, *Der Zusammenbruch des Freien Deutschen Gewerkschaftsbundes (FDGB): Zunehmender Entscheidungsdruck, institutionalisierte Handlungs- schwächung und Zerfall der hierarchischen Organisationsstruktur* (Ostfildern: Westdeutscher Verlag, 2013), 16.

federal board of the FDGB would note in 1982, the organisation “made an effort to further the internationalist attitudes of its members.”¹²⁴

The higher echelons of the FDGB were members of the ruling elite: both of the organisation’s chairmen, Herbert Warnke (1948–1975) and Harry Tisch (1975–1989) were members of the Politburo, as were many other leading functionaries. The FDGB boasted roughly 50 departments, including its own department for foreign relations, and a travel department which had almost 10,000 permanent staff in 1975.¹²⁵ The lowest level of FDGB position one could hold were the *Vertrauensleute*, or union delegates, who were elected in a representatives in workplaces by small groups of roughly 20 workers. In the mid-1980s, Renate Hürtgen estimates that there were almost 350,000 such positions in operation, and she cites Tisch, who claimed in 1987 that taken together, *Vertrauensleute* and other voluntary functionaries numbered an astounding 1.6 million, translating to roughly an eighth of the population.¹²⁶ Such numbers provide weight to Mary Fulbrook’s own estimate that one in six GDR citizens were in some way involved in the “micro-systems of power through which GDR society worked.”¹²⁷ The FDGB, then, provides a lens through which one can view the state’s attempt to “transmit” the orientation toward the proto-socialist world to the masses: as we will see, this was not always a success. Instead, it was a complex process involving successes and failures, resistance and appropriation.

¹²⁴ Ulrich van der Heyden, *GDR Development Policy in Africa: Doctrine and Strategies Between Illusions and Reality 1960-1990 the Example (South) Africa* (Münster: LIT Verlag, 2013), 48.

¹²⁵ Thomas Schaufuss, *Die politische Rolle des FDGB-Ferienstes in der DDR: Sozialtourismus im SED-Staat* (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 2011), 68.

¹²⁶ Hürtgen, *Zwischen Disziplinierung und Partizipation*, 10.

¹²⁷ Fulbrook, *The People’s State*, 236.

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Structure

A key aim of this thesis is to treat the GDR's orientation toward the proto-socialist world—as an idea as well as an active political project—as an object worthy of study in and of itself. In doing so, it recentres the GDR in global history, showing both its distinctiveness and its conformity. The GDR was a state both of a piece with its global context in an era where globalised visions of sovereignty were common, but also distinctive among its contemporaries; neither its allies in the Eastern bloc nor its western neighbours displayed so deep an orientation toward the extra-European world. The GDR would have been a very different place without such an orientation, which was a central preoccupation of its leaders, and defined important areas of culture and everyday life. Such a claim involves all spheres of activity in the state. In order to justify it this thesis thus takes a big-picture approach, while at the same time utilising five multidirectional, interweaving case studies. Taken together, these studies provide the big picture, elucidating how and why GDR elites sought to orientate their country to the proto-socialist world and the form that this orientation took, how the state sought to co-opt citizens (both from the GDR and abroad) into this orientation, and how citizens responded to this attempt.

Running throughout the thesis like a thread is the distinctive vision of globalisation produced by elites in the GDR from the 1960s to the state's demise. Instead of autarchy, a conception of *socialist* globalisation was produced in the GDR. This vision imagined the state as forming a component part of a constantly expanding worldwide constellation of socialist and proto-socialist nations. From the beginning, the notion of the “socialist world system” was tied to a vision of convergence between socialist nations: in the GDR, the concept of *Heimat* was extended—using Marxist-Leninist accounts of social relations—to include the state's socialist allies. Such a vision did not mean casting aside autarchy in favour of openness. Rather, socialist globalization created a globalism which

skipped large parts of the capitalist world in favour of fellow socialist states, in a process remarkably similar to one later identified by James Ferguson, who claimed that “the global does not ‘flow’, thereby connecting and watering contiguous spaces; it hops instead, thereby efficiently connecting the enclaved points in the network while excluding (with equal efficiency) the spaces that lie between the points.”¹²⁸

Sticking to the theme of mobility, the five chapters in this thesis take this global vision in its many contexts: exploring how it was projected as an idea both outward and within the GDR, and how it caused, and was altered by, the actual movement of people. Chapter One begins with actors looking out at the proto-socialist world from within the GDR. It provides an intellectual history of the idea of the proto-socialist world, showing how these foreign policy elites constructed the idea of a proto-socialist world beyond Europe, and how this idea developed over time. This chapter will serve to reveal the idea of the proto-socialist world in its ideal form, how it was developed and changed over time in response to both the GDR’s priorities as well as changes in the proto-socialist world itself.

The second chapter, in contrast with the first’s focus on ideational projection outward, deals with actors from the proto-socialist world coming *into* to the GDR, and how the reality of actual exchange rubbed against the ideal. It also sets the scene at the beginning of the GDR’s turn to the proto-socialist world, the early 1960s. Examining an early GDR attempt to shape the proto-socialist world through the education of mostly African trade unionists in Berlin, the chapter shows how, even early on, the reality of actual connection upended the ideal produced the GDR elite. By displaying the importance of both the Sino-Soviet split and the obstinacy and ideological fervour—in other words, the agency—of the trade unionists, this chapter will show how, even at the

¹²⁸ James Ferguson, *Global Shadows: Africa in the Neoliberal World Order* (London: Duke University Press, 2006), 47.

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very beginning of the turn to the proto-socialist world, GDR elites found more complexity than they had first bargained for.

Occupying a space in between the two previous chapters' lines of approach, Chapter Three will analyse the idea of proto-socialist world as a relational dynamic *within* GDR society: between citizen and state. It will do so by examining a particular practice: *Solidaritätsspenden*, or solidarity donations: monthly donations to causes in the proto-socialist world which the vast majority of GDR citizens took part in. This chapter will show how the state sought to co-opt its citizenry in the turn to the proto-socialist world, and how GDR citizens reacted to this attempt, proving that its reception was more complex than has previously been depicted. In doing so, it will highlight the nature of the ideology of proto-socialism as one fundamentally rooted in everyday practices in the GDR.

Chapter Four offers a different perspective: one of GDR citizens going out into the proto-socialist world. Exploring the practice of FDGB holidays to Cuba, this chapter will illustrate how the proto-socialist world was imagined as a cure to many of the GDR's ills. It will highlight the ideas that accompanied this practice, revealing the contradictions they threw up in practice. As one of the very few examples of a state in the proto-socialist world actually realising its socialist potential, Cuba was imagined as sharing similar objective qualities to the GDR: despite this, it was othered as exotic and backward.

Chapter five encompasses two directions, looking at how the idea of a proto-socialist world influenced entertainment within the GDR, as well as the realities of producing such forms of entertainment in the proto-socialist world. Focusing on the 1980s television series *Treffpunkt Flughafen*, which centred on the adventures of a plane crew who travel across the proto-socialist world, this chapter provides two key contributions to the thesis; it showcases the effect that the turn to the proto-socialist world had on the sphere of entertainment, and, by virtue of its focus on the 1980s, highlights the realities

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of the turn to the proto-socialist world in its mature phase, quite far removed from the early optimism of the 1960s.

Bookended by two more temporally focused studies and the beginning and end of the GDR's orientation to the proto-socialist world, this study takes the period from the beginning of the 1960s to the end of the GDR's existence as its timeframe. The FDGB plays a key role in the middle of the thesis: Chapters Two, Three, and Four, matching the symbolic role they played in-between citizen and state in the GDR. This is not an exhaustive study of the GDR's relationship with the extra-European world. Instead it takes a singular idea linking five different case studies spanning a variety of social and cultural spheres. In the process it shows how this idea affected the life of the state, and life *within* the state, while at the same time illustrating its depth and complexity. While to some extent overlapping, the heterogeneity of these five case studies gestures toward the ubiquity of the proto-socialist world within the GDR, from the Politburo down to popular television and the factory floor, from travel brochures to the complex reports of foreign policy elites.

Source Base

This project uses research performed in five different archives: the Federal Archives in Berlin-Lichterfelde, particularly the Foundation Archive of Parties and Mass Organisations in the GDR; the Stasi Records Agency in Berlin; The Political Archive of the German Foreign Ministry; The Institute for International Relations at the University Archive of Potsdam, and the German Broadcasting Archive.

While many of the actors in this story involved are still alive, this thesis relies upon the archival record instead of oral history. The wide-ranging subject matter meant that research in the form of formal interviews would have been unable—unless performed on an unrealistically large scale—to provide comprehensive and reliable evidence.

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Furthermore, there are well-documented issues regarding contemporary oral histories of the GDR, with narratives often shaped by frameworks of understanding that were picked up in the 1990s.¹²⁹ This project thus draws heavily on archival sources, as well as contemporary academic texts, television, film, and literature.

The archival work for the thesis was guided by two potentially contradictory methods, reading both *against* and *with* the archival grain. Taken together, this contradiction creates a productive tension which allows for expansive use of the archival record, retaining fidelity to the historical reality of the subject matter while challenging pre-set convictions regarding the GDR. With regard to reading *against* the grain, it was determined that to argue—as this project does—for a fundamental reorientation in approach, it was necessary to consciously seek out the blind spots of the historical record: areas that had been neglected or ignored. Despite the East German state’s well documented high modernist drive for *flächendeckend* (literally, surface-covering) knowledge and documentation of its populations and activities, the GDR’s archival record is, although comparatively expansive, not without its blind spots.¹³⁰ Nor, of course, is the archive a “flat” space in which all information is equally accessible and organized: as with all archives, the archival remnants of the GDR display the biases and areas of interest of archivists and historians. To a certain degree then, working to upset existing biases involves making an active and conscious effort to find examples within the archival record which challenge existing narratives.

The archival material in this project was often used for that reason. While the majority of writing on GDR foreign policy elites has focused on Europe and West Germany, for example, removing this European focus when reading their reports and correspondence revealed that that the extra-European world was central to their

¹²⁹ On this, see Fulbrook, “Histories and Memories: Verklärung or Erklärung?,” 94.

¹³⁰ On this, see Annie Ring, “The (W)Hole in the Archive,” *Paragraph* 37, no. 3 (2014): 387–402.

thinking. Similarly, most studies of the FDGB have failed to note the centrality of transnational work to the organisation's activities, an absence which required a re-reading of the FDGB's archival record with a critical eye. To a certain degree, then, reading against the archival grain meant illuminating areas and evidence which had previously been neglected. In some cases, this meant that the relevant archival documents existed in areas of the archive that remained unprocessed at the time of research, including the files of the *Reisebüro der DDR* or those relating to *Kommerzielle Koordination*, making them difficult to access.

Although it is my contention that evidence for the GDR's turn to the proto-socialist world can be found across the state's archival landscape, any project of this scope and scale is likely to invite concerns regarding selectivity. As already noted, this is not an exhaustive study of this topic and is guilty of numerous omissions. The areas of focus and their archival bases were chosen to achieve a balance of being representative while highlighting novel and previous unexamined material. Chapter One builds upon the work of foreign policy scholars who have mined the GDR archives for material that can depict the vicissitudes of GDR foreign policy: it draws largely on similar material, but places emphasis on the previously largely ignored regions of the proto-socialist world. At the time of researching, the seminar reports and *Hochschule* files that form the basis of Chapter Two had not yet been used by scholars, and they were picked to provide a micro-history of a short time period which was held, on balance, to be representative of broader trends. The archival work for Chapters Three and Four was more expansive: based mainly on a large search of the database of the records of the Stasi for reports regarding solidarity donations and Cuba trips and FDGB material. This often involved covering new archival ground, as both cases represent lacunae in the GDR historiography. As I hope to have demonstrated with the archival material, these are two topics which warrant a more central place in the historiography, with these two chapters representing a step toward that. Chapter Five builds on the work of TV historians of

the GDR, but similarly to Chapters One and Two seeks a reorientation toward the importance of the proto-socialist world for GDR TV.

While reading in many cases *against* the archival grain, then, this project was also informed by the desire to avoid many of the pitfalls of such a methodology. In this, I took inspiration from the epistemological premises and theoretical work of scholars of empire such as Ann Laura Stoler, whose concept of “archival form” inspired much of the archival work carried out for this thesis. Stoler suggests reading archives not as “skewed and biased sources” but rather as “condensed sites of epistemological and political anxiety,” or “transparencies on which power relations were inscribed,” focusing on “prose style, repetitive refrain, categories of confidentiality and classification...[and] genres of documentation.”¹³¹ Stoler, of course, is dealing with the epistemological consequences of metropolitan rule of far-flung colonies. But the GDR archives, for our purposes, serve a similar function: the GDR’s alignment with the proto-socialist world was a fundamentally top-down process, a political project initiated by elites. One does not have to deny the agency of GDR citizens, who were able to reshape this project in a myriad of ways, nor to revive the once-dominant totalitarianism school in order to acknowledge this. But the state’s leading role in the GDR justifies the usage of archives as a source base in which, to quote another work on the colonial state archive: “one reads the predicaments, both known and unknown, that give rise to the calculations, strategies, forms, and practices of imperial rule.”¹³² The form of rule in the GDR was not imperial, of course, but the GDR’s orientation to the proto-socialist world was one informed by similar qualities: the calculations, strategies, forms and practices of socialist sovereignty.

¹³¹ Ann Laura Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 20.

¹³² Lisa Lowe, *The Intimacies of Four Continents* (Durham: Duke University Press Books, 2015), 4-5.

How does this translate to archival methodology? One key premise of this thesis is that ideology ought to be taken seriously, both as a sincerely held worldview on the part of elites, and, as a lived experience within the GDR, a facet of everyday life. Ideology was the tie that bound the GDR to the proto-socialist world. As such, it is important to take the ideological language that is present in the archive seriously, reading it not as a cipher to be decoded or a cloak for rational policy aims, but rather an important subject in and of itself. As such reading *along* the grain means that rather than plumbing, as Stoler writes, “for the ‘hidden message’ or those subliminal texts that couch ‘the real’ below the surface and between the written lines,” we seek rather to “identify the pliable coordinates of what constituted...common sense.”¹³³

As Mathieu Denis has noted, historians of the GDR can be divided into two camps regarding the value of the expansive amount of reports and protocols the GDR left behind. While one camp argues the “ideological formalism” of such texts makes them meaningless, a second camp sees them as being written in a plain enough language to act as normative sources on every life within the GDR. Denis claims both the positions are wrong, for they share a similar belief “that reported information is either ideological or meaningful.” In contrast to this shared belief, Denis argues that such texts are meaningful precisely because they are ideological, arguing that it is their “standardized form and ideologically constructed language” that provides the key to reading GDR archival texts.¹³⁴ Following Denis, this study thus attempts to read *with* the ideologically constructed language of the GDR archive, seeing its shifting form and structure as evidence in and of itself.

¹³³ Ann Laura Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 3.

¹³⁴ Mathieu Denis, “Reading East German Bureaucrats: The Rhetoric of the GDR Trade Union Reports,” *Social History* 37, no. 2 (May 1, 2012): 143–44.

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In sum then, the archival methodology used here seeks to make use of the creative tension between reading within and against the grain, recognising that in any case, the two methodologies bear a tendency to overlap. Any historian carrying out archival research must to some degree tow this line, avoiding an overly combative, suspicious hermeneutical approach while at the same time recognising that an archive not a random or complete collection, deferring to the source material and attempting to represent, as best possible, the subjectivities that such material embodies. If successful, such an approach allows the historian to retain his or her faithfulness to the archival record while at the same time revealing and shedding light on the lesser known areas with this record.

Chapter One - Understanding the GDR's Global Context: Foreign Policy Elites and the Proto-Socialist World

Untethered, the GDR would not have seen the light of day.

Alexander Schalck-Golodkowski, GDR trade apparatchik.¹³⁵

I think of Arbenz in Guatemala; of Bosch in the Dominican Republic; of Lumumba in Africa; Ben Bella in Algeria; Nkrumah in Ghana; Cabral in Guinea-Bissau...

Hermann Axen, head of the SED Foreign Policy Commission and Politburo member.¹³⁶

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The notion of a proto-socialist world was explicitly ideological, and took up a hugely important role in the global imaginary of GDR elites. Consider, for example, a conversation published after the *Wende* between Harald Neubert, the former director of the Academy for Social Sciences at the Institute for the International Workers Movements in the GDR, and Hermann Axen, head of the SED Foreign Policy Commission and Politburo member, in which they look back upon the GDR's relationship on what by, then, they were calling the "Third World":

¹³⁵ "Das war die DDR."

¹³⁶ Axen and Neubert, *Ich war ein Diener der Partei*, 400.

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Neubert: I remember that Ponomarev [Boris, Secretary for International Relations of the CPSU] had once explained that the countries of the Third World, thanks to the national liberation movements, would shift from a “reserve of world imperialism” to a “reserve of world socialism.” This was bound up with the expectation that these countries, or at least a portion of them, would develop toward socialism. The revolutionary developments in these countries were supported not only for their anti-imperialist, anti-colonial orientation but also because one believed that in these countries, despite their low development levels, a socialist course was possible...

Axen: You are right, this emanated from the theoretical and strategic evaluation of the national liberation movements. The Chinese revolution, the developments in Korea and in Vietnam had a great influence on our thinking. Lenin had suggested that socialism could be quickly built in the developed nations, but power was more difficult to obtain there. This was reversed in the less developed countries. We thus believed that the developed countries could be surrounded...After 1945, great advances took place in this regard...We saw many new possibilities for the development of small, less developed countries.¹³⁷

This ideological certainty did not come automatically to GDR elites or foreign policy theorists by virtue of Marxism-Leninism, which boasted only a scattering of interventions on the topic prior to the latter half of the twentieth century. It was, instead, something that had to be continuously constructed and reconstructed. This chapter will illustrate how the idea of proto-socialism was built, how it interacted with foreign policy in the GDR, who the actors who built it were, and how it shifted over time.

Naturally, ideology plays little role in legitimacy-based understandings of GDR foreign policy. If the GDR's engagement with the proto-socialist world was driven purely by a desire to improve the GDR's symbolic standing among its own citizenry, it would

¹³⁷ *ibid.*, 399-400.

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make sense that the ideological basis for such an engagement would remain broadly similar over the time. Instead, as we will see, changes in policy tended in fact to be driven by events in the proto-socialist world rather than stemming from domestic concerns. Legitimacy is, above all, a *realpolitikal* aim. Yet it is a curious feature of the literature that while the GDR is often depicted as an ideologically driven, “abnormal” state, its foreign policy tends to be analysed on the basis of rational calculation. In this reading, highly ideological GDR foreign policy precepts such as anti-imperialism, international solidarity, and class struggle are presented as veils for more rational policy goals such as political recognition, entrance into international institutions, socialist-led unification with the West, or delineation from it (*Abgrenzung*) thereafter. Ideology and power politics in the GDR are not so easily separated, however. Indeed, as a general rule, drawing a hard distinction between ideology and power may ultimately be an impossible task. More interesting and fruitful is, as William Wohlforth has argued in relation to ideology in the Cold War, investigating how the two relate.¹³⁸

If not through a narrow lens of the obtaining of legitimacy then, how did GDR elites view their place in the world? What were the subjective contours of the GDR global imaginary, and how was it distinct within the world of Marxism-Leninist states and ideas? In other words, what were the subjective dimensions of the global visions produced in the GDR? The central preoccupation of the majority of studies into globalization have taken objective features as their central focus, with its subjective nature only a secondary concern. The spread of physical objects and institutions—in short, material processes—has largely taken prominence over the subjective meanings and ideas associated with globalization.¹³⁹ In this regard, the socialist world is no outlier. Indeed, up until recently,

¹³⁸ William C. Wohlforth, “Ideology and the Cold War,” *Review of International Studies* 26, no. 2 (2000): 327.

¹³⁹ As Manfred Steger and Paul James put it, “thousands of books and articles have now been devoted to the economics and technologies of globalization, the politics of globalization, and only secondarily the culture of globalization.” Manfred B. Steger and Paul James, “Levels of

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the socialist world was above all understood as a *victim* of globalization, rather than bearing any kind of subjective responsibility for its construction.¹⁴⁰ This chapter will redress this balance, providing an intellectual history of the notion of the proto-socialist world and the GDR elites which created it.

This chapter will therefore reveal the world in which GDR foreign policy experts, and by extension GDR elites, believed they were operating in. It will show how the proto-socialist world featured repeatedly as an important factor in conceptualisations of the GDR's sovereignty. In the 1960s, when a diplomatically isolated GDR laboured under a curious form of existential anxiety, the proto-socialist world acted as an important "other," through which GDR elites affirmed the existence of their state. In the 1970s the high period of the GDR's international confidence saw elites grow convinced of the inevitability of capitalism's collapse in the West, inspired by developments in the proto-socialist world. But as these developments unravelled in the 1980s, GDR elites began to radically lose faith in the prospect of the "encirclement" of the imperialist world, and began to look elsewhere for solutions, a process that was eventually cut short by the revolutions of 1989.

Who were the elites that developed this taxonomy? Is it possible to speak of a singular foreign policy elite? Recent scholarship on the Soviet Union's foreign policy has suggested significant divergence detectable between the different institutions of the state.¹⁴¹ In contrast, the GDR was long held to be distinctive for the unity of its elite,

Subjective Globalization: Ideologies, Imaginaries, Ontologies," *Perspectives on Global Development and Technology* 12, no. 1-2 (January 1, 2013): 19.

¹⁴⁰ Typical here is the association of state socialism with "immobility." Czech émigré Lubomir Sochor typified this view in his critique of "real existing socialism": "real socialism is an important factor in maintaining the immobility of Soviet society. This ideology helps make immobility a chronic social disease, it generalises it by adding intellectual immobility to the immobility of social relations and institutions." Alec Nove, *Marxism and "Really Existing Socialism"* (London: Taylor & Francis, 2013), 20.

¹⁴¹ See for example, Oscar Sanchez-Sibony's controversial monograph on the Soviet economy. Critics have suggested that Sanchez-Sibony's focus on the files from the Soviet department of trade has skewed his account of Soviet foreign policy more generally. Sanchez-Sibony, *Red Globalization*; For an example of this critique, see "H-Diplo Roundtable XVI, 24 on Red

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thanks in equal parts to its relatively small size and strict SED control.¹⁴² This image has begun to erode in recent years, as studies have increasingly uncovered fissures within the party-state.¹⁴³ This chapter will tow a line between both arguments. In the case of foreign policy, particularly of the extra-European variety, it is often difficult to sift through the outward appearance of unity to detect divergence. As Stephen Kotkin has noted with reference to the Soviet archives, “what we call ‘policymaking’ is very hard to reconstruct from the secret archives because documents in party and state archives are not simply records; they are artifacts of planned, executed, or thwarted intrigues, expressions of bureaucratic interests, to be sure, but also weapons of attack...or fabrication...in the name of party truth.”¹⁴⁴ The GDR was no exception to this rule. Even the records of the highest offices—including that of Honecker or the Politburo—sometimes serve only to reveal what we *cannot* know. To take just one example, when Politburo member Horst Dohlus met Ethiopian leader Haile Mengistu Mariam in March of 1989, he wrote to Honecker before issuing his report to the Politburo: “As I assume is correct, I have not included the comments that Mengistu made to me at dinner in the report, but will instead inform you of these in person. If you are in agreement, I will forward the report on the Politburo for consultation.”¹⁴⁵ The deliberative aspects of foreign policy in the GDR and the ideas that undergirded them

Globalization: The Political Economy of the Soviet Cold War from Stalin to Khrushchev [27 April 2015] | H-Diplo | H-Net,” accessed July 13, 2018, <https://networks.h-net.org/node/28443/discussions/68413/h-diplo-roundtable-xvi-24-red-globalization-political-economy>.

¹⁴² See for example Epstein, *The Last Revolutionaries*, 217.

¹⁴³ In particular, see evidence of inner-SED divisions in the 1980s in Andreas Malycha, *Die SED in der Ära Honecker, Machtstrukturen, Entscheidungsmechanismen und Konfliktfelder in der Staatspartei 1971 bis 1989* (Berlin: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2014), 435–45.

¹⁴⁴ Stephen Kotkin, “The State—Is It Us? Memoirs, Archives, and Kremlinologists,” *The Russian Review* 61, no. 1 (2002): 47.

¹⁴⁵ SAPMO-BArch, DY 30/2419 Letter from Horst Dohlus to Honecker, 31.3.1989. Given the scaling back of Soviet support for Ethiopia at the time, it was tempting—but ultimately impossible—to conclude that these comments involved criticism of the Soviet stance.

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are often difficult to uncover.¹⁴⁶ As we will see, even in the case of a clear shift of thinking in the late 1970s while it may be possible to identify the agents of change, controversy and disagreement were conspicuously absent. What *is* possible, and what therefore this chapter aims to do, is to reveal the discursive framework within which world events were interpreted: the ideological background, or what Jeremy Friedman has called the “prism through which information about the world is received and deciphered.”¹⁴⁷

Foundations: Sovereignty, Ideology and Geopolitics in the GDR

The notion of a proto-socialist world, of course, had its roots in Leninist theory.¹⁴⁸ But beyond roots in the Leninist claim for the necessity of world revolution, the fundamental framework in which GDR elite imaginaries were constructed was the Cold War. As Hermann Wentker has claimed, the Cold War was both an “emergence condition” [Entstehungsbedingung] and “existence condition” [Existenzbedingung] for the state.¹⁴⁹ All states, Wentker correctly notes, exist in international systems in some form of inequality or another.¹⁵⁰ But the GDR's relationship with the Soviet Union, as well as

¹⁴⁶ Fullbrook, *The People's State*, 181.

¹⁴⁷ Friedman, *Shadow Cold War*, 21.

¹⁴⁸ Lenin had claimed in 1917 that imperialism was a “moribund” form of capitalism, without explicitly arguing for the possibility of socialism in the extra European world. V. I. Lenin, *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism* (Sydney: Resistance Books, 1999); Three years later, he would argue that that the socialist world must united behind the so-called “bourgeois-democratic” revolutions in the colonial world on the basis that they would allow for the development of “proletarian parties” in the future. “Draft Theses on National and Colonial Questions For The Second Congress Of The Communist International,” accessed September 9, 2019, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1920/jun/05.htm>.

¹⁴⁹ Hermann Wentker, *Aussenpolitik in engen Grenzen: die DDR im internationalen System, 1949-1989*. (Munich: Oldenbourg, 2007), 1.

¹⁵⁰ *ibid.*, 3.

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COMECON, was often strained.¹⁵¹ In the constricting, apparently zero-sum conditions of the Cold War, it thus made sense for GDR elites to look beyond Europe for allies. But what did they see when they did so?

To begin to comprehend this, it is important to understand the global taxonomy produced by GDR elites as well as the nature and function of said elite. Here the first and most noteworthy aspect is the division of the globe into spheres that largely mirrored Alfred Sauvy's Cold War three-world model; in the minds of GDR elites the world was divided into countries belonging to the "capitalist abroad" [kapitalisches Ausland], the countries of the "socialist world system" [sozialistisches Weltsystem], with a smaller component within this system the "socialist state community" [sozialistisches Staatsgemeinschaft] represented by the countries of the Warsaw Pact, and "developing countries" [Entwicklungsländer], occasionally in earlier years referred to as "young national states" [jung Nationalstaaten], and then in the 1980s as "Third World" [Dritte Welt], although usually with scare quotes. Within the socialist world system, GDR elites repeatedly called for further integration and attempted to implement concrete policy proposals toward this aim.¹⁵² But ultimately, this taxonomy was underpinned by a dialectical view of history and geopolitics: two opposing camps, the imperialist and the socialist, faced each other. From the early 1960s onward, the proto-socialist world would be seen to play a decisive role—both as an indicator of the relative strengths of each side in this struggle and as a participant within it—in deciding which side of this bipolar struggle would emerge victorious.

¹⁵¹ Hope M. Harrison has shown in great detail the conflicts that emerged between the GDR and its patron state in the Ulbricht era. Harrison, *Driving the Soviets up the Wall*; Later on, the struggles between Honecker and Brezhnev are well documented in Kopstein, *The Politics of Economic Decline in East Germany, 1945-1989*, see especially 89-94.

¹⁵² See, for example Universitätsarchiv Potsdam, Deutsche Akademie für Staats- und Rechtswissenschaft der DDR, (Hereafter DASR) Institut für Internationale Beziehungen (Hereafter IIB) 13135, "Zu Entwicklungstendenzen des Zusammenwirkens der Staaten der sozialistischen Gemeinschaft in der internationalen Klassenauseinandersetzung." This is also a finding of Laurien Crump's history of the Warsaw Pact. Crump, *The Warsaw Pact Reconsidered*, 145.

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Who were the elites that developed this taxonomy? In his 2009 PhD dissertation on the topic, Stephen J Scala notes that the question of elite unity depends to some degree on the period in question. As we will see, the construction of a recognisable foreign policy apparatus only really took place in the 1970s as the structures of policy formation became more formalized. Before this, leading figures in the party had largely dictated foreign policy. As Scala notes, however, Marxism-Leninism dictated that throughout the GDR's history the operative and analytic features of foreign policy would remain broadly unified, so that the distinction between experts and politicians never assumed as clear a form as it does today in liberal democracies, for example.¹⁵³

The GDR was a small nation run by a small subset of leaders. The leading figures within foreign policy were a yet smaller group. Their respective organs were the Foreign Policy and International Relations Division [Division für Außenpolitik und Internationale Verbindungen], or DAIV, on the side of the Party, and the Ministry for Foreign Affairs [Ministerium für Auswärtige Angelegenheiten], or MfAA on the side of the state. The latter was technically subordinate to the former; the DAIV being a coordinating body, acting as a go-between between Politburo, Secretariat and other state divisions and bodies as well as maintaining relations with communist parties abroad. The MfAA was, in contrast, an executive body that would carry out the day-to-day foreign policy tasks set by the Politburo and communicated via the DAIV. It also produced foreign policy analysis.

In theory, policy was decided collectively by the leaders of the Foreign Policy and International Relations Division, and implemented by the leaders of the Foreign Office. There was also input from a small collection of Politburo members who had specific roles relating to foreign policy and ideology, most notably Hermann Axen, Kurt Hager, and Werner Lamberz. At least outwardly, loyalty to the party trumped special interests.

¹⁵³ Stephen J. Scala, "Understanding the Class Enemy: Foreign Policy Expertise in East Germany" (Ph.D. diss., University of Maryland, 2009), 77.

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There existed no meaningful foreign policy interest groups in the GDR. The army, as Klaus Storkmann has shown, was entirely subservient to the SED.¹⁵⁴ Soviet reluctance to allow German rearmament survived the immediate post-war era, meaning that there existed no military-industrial complex nor a sizable military industry in the GDR, which imported the majority of its weaponry from Soviets or produced light arms under Soviet license.¹⁵⁵ Sensational West German claims regarding GDR arms dealing proved somewhat exaggerated after the *Wende*; as Storkmann shows, the GDR “gifted” large amounts of weapons to states in the proto-socialist world as well as selling them, but this was never a significant element of the GDR economy.¹⁵⁶ The closest thing to an arms lobby in the GDR came through Alexander Schalck-Golodkowski’s Department for Commercial Coordination (KoKo), a notorious, Stasi-linked trade body which raised hard currency and conducted foreign trade for the GDR through a variety of legal and semi-legal means. In the 1980s, KoKo founded an arms trading company, IMES, which sold weapons mostly to the developing world, including both sides of the Iran-Iraq war; even within KoKo’s balance sheets, however, IMES was a small player, contributing a small fraction of its profits.¹⁵⁷ Furthermore, despite KoKo’s importance in GDR trade—boasting an almost 50 percent share of foreign trade by the early 1980s—it continued to “act within the same economic policy decreed by the party leadership, which was not put into question,” Maximilian Graf writes.¹⁵⁸

Despite the fact that different priorities could, as we will see, be detected between

¹⁵⁴ Klaus P. Storkmann, *Geheime Solidarität: Militärbeziehungen und Militärhilfen der DDR in die “Dritte Welt”* (Berlin: Ch. Links Verlag, 2012), 595.

¹⁵⁵ Rainer Karlsch, “Die Rüstungsindustrie der DDR im Überblick,” in *Militär, Staat und Gesellschaft in der DDR: Forschungsfelder, Ergebnisse, Perspektiven*, ed. Hans Gotthard Ehlert and Matthias Rogg (Berlin: Ch. Links Verlag, 2004).

¹⁵⁶ Storkmann, *Geheime Solidarität*, 596.

¹⁵⁷ Matthias Judt, *Der Bereich Kommerzielle Koordinierung: das DDR-Wirtschaftsimperium des Alexander Schalck-Golodkowski: Mythos und Realität* (Berlin: Ch. Links Verlag, 2013), 256–61.

¹⁵⁸ Maximilian Graf, “Before Strauß: The East German Struggle to Avoid Bankruptcy During the Debt Crisis Revisited,” *The International History Review*, (August 5, 2019): 3.

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different groups within the Politburo, intergenerational dynamics don't seem to have played a particularly important role in foreign policy circles. Catherine Epstein, for example, has argued that the GDR consisted of three explicit generations: the "Old Communists," who joined the KPD before the war, the "Hitler Youth" generation, born in the late 1920s, and the "Hineingeborene" who were born after the war. Epstein argues that a chasm opened up between the latter and the first two generations; the Hitler Youth generation was subservient to the Old Communists, but together the two groups failed to transmit their ideological precepts to the Hineingeborene.¹⁵⁹ Within the party-state, no such conflict was detectable, for not a single member of the Hineingeborene managed to enter the leadership structures in either the party or the foreign office. Similarly, of the 204 members of the diplomatic corps in the 1970s and 1980s, only five were born after 1942.¹⁶⁰

In the period that the GDR can meaningfully said to have had a foreign policy (from 1955, when it was granted full sovereignty by the Soviet Union, until 1989) it had three foreign ministers. Lothar Bolz, (1953–1965) and Otto Winzer (1965–1975) were both Old Communists, while Oskar Fischer (1974–1990) was a member of the Hitler Youth Generation. No GDR foreign minister was ever elected the Politburo—which appears to have been a deliberate policy—although all of them were seen as close allies to the leaders at the time: Bolz and Winzer spent time in exile in Moscow, while Ulbricht, Fischer and Honecker shared ties from their days working at the FDJ.¹⁶¹ Similarly, the first significant head of the SED division of international relations, Peter Florin, was from the Old Communist generation, and his successors Paul Markowski, Egon

¹⁵⁹ See Epstein, *The Last Revolutionaries*, 214–44.

¹⁶⁰ Ronald Gebauer, "Cadres on the Diplomatic Stage. The Social Origins and Career Patterns of GDR's Ambassadors.," *Historical Social Research / Historische Sozialforschung* 36 (January 1, 2011): 314.

¹⁶¹ Michel Vale and Eberhard Schulz, "Decisive Factors in GDR Foreign Policy," *International Journal of Politics* 11, no. 4 (1981): 23.

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Winkelmann, and Günter Sieber were all from the Hitler Youth generation and all either in the Politburo or one of its associated commissions.

This small set of figures also came to be closely intertwined with the research centres for foreign issues. Connecting them was an ideological language which was used in all walks of life. This language was a key factor in blurring the operative and analytic functions of foreign policy; internal reports on foreign developments produced by researchers tending to read similarly to the public pronouncements of party officials, which were rooted in Marxist-Leninist analyses of world-historical developments. There is very little evidence of open divergence between the two groups until a short period at the very end of the GDR's existence.¹⁶²

As already noted, this shared ideological language is often present as a veil, a *post facto* justification for *Realpolitik*. If this is true, however, why would the SED have produced miles and miles of documents worth of internal, secret analysis in this register? In 1964, the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, concerned about the Democratic People's Republic of Korea's (DPRK) relations with China in light of the Sino-Soviet split, produced a confidential 35-page report on the issue, outlining similarities and differences in the politics of China and the DPRK. The authors established, first and foremost, that the class nature of the North Korean leadership defined its policies, which stemmed "overwhelmingly" from elements in the petit bourgeois or intelligentsia. Instead of attributing any of the thaw in DPRK-GDR relations to *Realpolitik* stemming from the Sino-Soviet split the authors went to great efforts to put the differences down to the class composition of the DPRK leadership and to the resulting ideological differences. These differences were outlined in great detail, using substantial quotations

¹⁶² Scala argues that a gulf opened up between GDR leadership and foreign policy experts in the 1980s, as the former clung to orthodoxy and the latter adopted tenets of the Soviet "New Thinking." Scala, "Understanding the Class Enemy," 29.

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from theoretical works written in Korea, on subjects ranging from “the definition of the contemporary epoch” to “position on the questions of state and revolution.”¹⁶³

In both form and content, GDR *Außenpolitik* was distinctly ideological, and stands out as such in comparison with other socialist bloc countries. Under Marxism-Leninism it functioned as, to quote the GDR's 1973 political dictionary: “A component of the politics of a state's ruling class...socialist *Außenpolitik* is based on the class nature of the socialist state, which in turn is defined by the character of the ruling working class and its revolutionary party of struggle.”¹⁶⁴ The idea that the class nature of a state defined its *Außenpolitik* applied to other states too, and was taken seriously. This was ideology, of course, and like all forms of ideology its application to real-world events, as in the case of North Korea, could in hindsight appear crude and detached from facts on the ground. On other occasions however, it could appear sober and prescient. A report on the Iran-Iraq war from 1984, for example, named the source of conflict as the “desire for regional supremacy” on both sides, and saw US involvement in the war as driven by a desire to perpetuate it in order to maintain its own hegemony in the region and eliminate pro-Soviet tendencies—an assessment shared by many historians today.¹⁶⁵ Similarly, a GDR foreign policy expert's prediction in 1975 that Chinese foreign policy following the North Vietnamese victory in the Vietnam war would result in increased conflict between the two states would prove prescient when China invaded Vietnam in 1979.¹⁶⁶ The point here is not to open up a debate about the merits of Marxist-Leninist theory, but rather

¹⁶³ SAPMO-BArch, DY 30/70836, “Vorlage für die Außenpolitische Kommission beim Politbüro des ZK der SED.”

¹⁶⁴ Kleines Politisches Wörterbuch, 86.

¹⁶⁵ DASR IIB, 13220, “Thesen zur Diplomarbeit: „Der Einfluß des Konfliktes Irak-Iran auf die Entwicklung im Nahen und Mittleren Osten.” On US aims in the Iraq-Iran war, see: Judith Yaphe, “Changing American Perspectives on the Iraq-Iran War,” in *The Iran-Iraq War: New International Perspectives*, ed. Nigel John Ashton and Bryan R. Gibson (London: Routledge, 2013), 178–96.

¹⁶⁶ Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amtes (hereafter PA AA), Bestand Ministerium für Auswärtige Angelegenheiten (hereafter MfAA), MR-A 64, “Politische Orientierung über Asien nach dem Sieg der Völker in Vietnam, Laos und Kambodscha,” 7.

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to emphasise that this ideological language was a lens through which events on the ground were viewed, rather than a blindfold that insulated them from such events.

The 1960s: The Proto-Socialist World and Existential Anxiety

While Marxism-Leninism had always taken the globe to be a proto-socialist one, the idea gained particular credence in the GDR in the 1960s thanks to the concurrent processes of decolonisation and the dwindling of hopes for a unified, socialist Germany. This shift can be summarised in the texts that were distributed to children who took the *Jugendweihe*, a secular coming of age ceremony practised by 14-year olds in the GDR: what Paul Betts has described as a “full-blown propagandistic affirmation of socialist victory, communal life, and state belonging.”¹⁶⁷ Three different texts were produced by the state during its existence and are revealing of the kind of *Weltanschauung* authorities wanted to impart upon its citizens, and how this vision changed over time. The first text, “Cosmos, Earth, Humanity” [*Weltall, Erde, Mensch*] was mostly focused on the natural sciences, apart from a few chapters toward the end of the book which dealt with human history. Notable within the 1956 edition is a passage by Jürgen Kuczynski, then leader of the Institute for Economic History at the Humboldt University;

In the period since the Second World War, the peoples of China and North Korea, Poland and Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Romania, Bulgaria and Albania, and recently also in the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, have all followed the example set by the Soviet Union. *The German Democratic Republic has been created in the eastern section of our fatherland.*

¹⁶⁷ Paul Betts, *Within Walls: Private Life in the German Democratic Republic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 59.

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In the nations of Indochina and Malaya a large amount of land is already freed from the rule of imperialism. The world of monopoly capitalists becomes increasingly smaller and narrower: from all sides it is under attack by exploited peoples.¹⁶⁸

In 1956, then, global socialism's prospects could be summarised in a paragraph which tellingly still spoke of the GDR as existing on the "eastern section of our fatherland." In contrast, *Weltall, Erde, Mensch* was replaced in 1974 with the much more politically zealous "Socialism - your World" [der Sozialismus - deine Welt], which was packed with propaganda on the proto-socialist world. Two maps adorn its front and back matter, the first showing "revolutionary movements following the Great October revolution, 1917 until 1923" and the second "the socialist world system and the international communist and workers' movement in 1974," the socialist world system coloured in pink dominating one half of the globe, the "imperialist main powers" in blue the other, and beyond them, a world to win: "the young national states of Asia, Africa and Latin America" coloured in yellow, with stars marking the founding of communist parties within this world. The remainder of the book focuses on the global transformation from capitalism to socialism, the functions of the socialist world system, and international socialist cooperation, with multiple articles on anti-imperialist solidarity, Vietnam's "struggle for the future", and developments in the proto-socialist world. One article, entitled "The Map Shows Where the World is Going" described the shifting "political landscape," boasting of "50 million communists on all continents, the leading force in the decisive class struggle across the globe: the greatest and most influential political movement of human history." Its closing line was typical of the optimism of the mid

¹⁶⁸ My emphasis. Jürgen Kuczynski, "Der Letzte Klassengesellschaft (Der Kapitalismus)," in *Weltall, Erde, Mensch: Ein Sammelwerk Zur Entwicklungsgeschichte von Natur Und Gesellschaft*, ed. Gisela Buschendorf, Horst Wolffgramm, and Irmgard Radandt (Berlin: Neues Leben, 1956), 409.

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1970s: “Yes, it is certain that tomorrow, today’s global maps will be outdated. Because where there is no socialism today, there will be socialism tomorrow.”¹⁶⁹

Who or what drove this growth of the idea of the proto-socialist world during the 1960s? As already noted, decolonisation in Africa had an important effect. 1960—the UN’s “year of Africa”—was proclaimed in the national press to be a “year of the consolidation of socialism,” with maps denoting the growth in the supposedly anti-imperialist states in Africa.¹⁷⁰ In 1960 a report on the international situation by Peter Florin, then head of the SED’s international division, claimed confidently that thanks to decolonisation, “the shifting of the balance of forces in favour of the socialist world is clearer than ever.”¹⁷¹ The euphoric effects of decolonisation filtered into foreign policy circles throughout the decade.

Foreign policy took some time to develop as a formal, institutionalised practice in the GDR. Institutions that would go on to play important roles in policy formation were set up during the 1950s, but only gained in importance in later decades. Although it was founded in the early 1950s, the Institute for International Relations [Institut für Internationale Beziehungen or IIB] had existed largely as a training centre for diplomats under the title Institute for International Law and International Relations until the mid-1960s, when it gained its new name and was reorganized as a central research institute.¹⁷² The lines between party and state nevertheless remained indistinct until the 1970s. Often, especially in the 1960s, personnel were more important than the byzantine web of institutions, commissions and ministries that formed the central foreign policy apparatus. Some figures held numerous important foreign policy positions at once.

¹⁶⁹ Heinrich Gemkow, ed., *Der Sozialismus, deine Welt* (Berlin: Verlag Neues Leben, 1975), 27–31.

¹⁷⁰ *Neue Zeit*, 1.1.1961, 8.

¹⁷¹ PA AA MfAA A 17829, “Gedanken zur Einschätzung der internationalen Lage.”

¹⁷² Erhard Crome, “Vorwort,” in *Die Babelsberger Diplomatschule: Das Institut für Internationale Beziehungen der DDR*, ed. Erhard Crome, 1st ed. (Potsdam: WeltTrends, 2009), 10.

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Hermann Axen was one such figure. Axen, an Auschwitz survivor, was born into a Jewish-German family and spoke English, Russian and French, a multilingualism that was a rare quality among the SED elite. He led the Foreign Policy Commission of the central committee of the SED (APK) from 1962 until the dissolution of the GDR; acted as secretary for international relations for the SED central committee from 1966; was a member of FRG working group from 1979 to 1981; responsible for relations with the countries of Africa, Asia and the Middle East from 1981 to 1989; as well as having positions on the presidium of the GDR peace committee.¹⁷³ “In the final analysis” in the Honecker era, Andreas Malycha has claimed, “foreign policy was the domain of Hermann Axen.”¹⁷⁴ In the 1960s the APK played an important role in policy formation; reviewing and debating all state agreements and treaties, making policy suggestions to the Politburo, and delivering reports. Axen often delivered summaries of the situation abroad orally to the APK.¹⁷⁵ The files of the APK thus provide an insight into how the notion of a proto-socialist world was constructed during the 1960s, in particular highlighting its relation to the notion of a unified Germany, as the latter idea receded.

In 1955 the Soviet Union granted formal sovereignty over foreign affairs to the GDR.¹⁷⁶ But the late 1950s through to the end of the 1960s were plagued by the BRD's

¹⁷³ Dieter Hoffmann et al., “Hermann Axen,” in *Wer war wer in der DDR? Ein Lexikon ostdeutscher Biographien: 2 Bände* (Berlin: Ch. Links Verlag, 2010).

¹⁷⁴ Malycha, *Die SED in der Ära Honecker, Machtstrukturen, Entscheidungsmechanismen und Konfliktfelder in der Staatspartei 1971 bis 1989*, 132.

¹⁷⁵ See for example SAPMO-BArch DY 30/70836 “Protokoll Nr.8/64 der Beratung der Außenpolitischen Kommission beim Politbüro am 3.7.1964.”

¹⁷⁶ Formal sovereignty, of course, was not the same thing as complete control over foreign policy. During the Cold War, it was commonplace to assert that the inputs of Eastern European countries, as the introduction to an edited collection from 1980 put it, were “sufficiently minor or ancillary to the inputs of other actors that they do not warrant specific and length consideration.” David Albright, “Introduction,” in *Africa and International Communism*, ed. David Albright (London: Macmillan, 1980), 5; As David Childs put in the mid 1980s, GDR policy was considered one of “following the Soviet interpretation of anti-imperialist struggle without question.” David Childs, *The GDR: Moscow's German Ally* (London: Routledge, 2014), 300; This view had already begun to receive criticism in the 1980s, from Ernst Hillebrand for example: Hillebrand, *Das Afrika-Engagement Der DDR*; Some scholars have nevertheless continued to denote the GDR as a “penetrated system” in the terminology of International

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Hallstein Doctrine. In this early phase the proto-socialist world was instrumentalised as the means through which an isolated GDR could gain recognition of its fragile sovereignty both during and after the Berlin crisis.¹⁷⁷ Otto Grotewohl, the GDR's prime minister (a largely ceremonial role), played upon his status as a survivor of Nazi internment, communicating with leaders the threat supposed threat that a unified Germany controlled by the West would pose. He shared letters with Gamal Abdel Nasser, the leader of Egypt (then known as the "United Arab Republic" (UAR) following short lived political union with Syria from 1959-1962), eventually visiting the UAR in 1959.¹⁷⁸ He also engaged in a stream of communication with Indian prime minister Jawaharlal Nehru in the late 1950s and early 1960s, attempting to convince him that plans for capitalist unification of Germany were a threat to world peace. Nehru's response was positive, and helped to convince GDR foreign policy elites that the proto-socialist world was contributing to what the AKP called a new "global spirit of détente"

Relations, whose possibilities of action were limited within a framework dictated by the GDR's dependence on the Soviet Union. The concept of a 'penetrated system' derives from James Rosenau. See: 'James N. Rosenau, "Pre-Theories and Theories of Foreign Policy," in *Approaches to Comparative and International Politics*, ed. Farrell, R. Barry (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1966); For an example of its application to the GDR, see Stefan Berger and Norman LaPorte, *Friendly Enemies: Britain and the GDR, 1949-1990* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2010); Others, such as Gareth Winrow, have tempered this view, describing instead what Winrow calls an "asymmetric interdependence" between the GDR and the Soviet Union. In Winrow's formulation, the GDR was an "affiliate" of the Soviet Union, meaning that it enjoyed a measure of autonomy rated somewhere between the opposing poles of a relatively autonomous client state and a completely subordinate penetrated one. Winrow, *The Foreign Policy of the GDR in Africa*, 3; Since the post-Wende opening of archives, scholars have shown that relationships between the states of the Eastern Bloc and the Soviet Union were marked by a measured degree of independence, which ebbed and flowed spasmodically with fluctuations in the international system. For an example, see: Crump, *The Warsaw Pact Reconsidered* Here I do not propose to offer my own formal model for this relationship but highlight the revisions to the "penetrated state" model in order to establish that the practice of solidarity in the GDR was not a frozen, non-negotiable Soviet imposition, but one constructed in a constant interplay with both the national and transnational contexts.

¹⁷⁷ Hong, *Cold War Germany, the Third World, and the Global Humanitarian Regime*, 177; Winrow, *The Foreign Policy of the GDR in Africa*, 47.

¹⁷⁸ PA AA MfAA A 17829, "Perspektivplan zur weiteren Entwicklung der Beziehungen der DDR zu den afrikanischen Staaten," 199.

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that was developing and leading to favourable conditions for the GDR.¹⁷⁹ The countries belonging to the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) were particular targets: in the run up to the 1961 Belgrade Conference on non-alignment, GDR diplomats and foreign policy chiefs were successful in convincing the leaders of the NAM countries to make reference to the existence of two German states.¹⁸⁰ While foreign office observers were disappointed that Nehru had failed to condemn the FRG adequately, a foreign office report from 1962 quoted his speech as evidence of the growing consciousness of the existence of two German states in South-East Asia. Nehru's claim that "There are two independent entities, powers, countries: the governments of West Germany (BRD) and East Germany (GDR). That is a fact of life...that must be recognised," was taken, alongside de facto recognition from India, Indonesia, Ceylon, Cambodia and Laos, as a positive development, although it was noted that economic pressure from the imperialist powers continued to block full-scale recognition.¹⁸¹

International organisations were of particular interest for the GDR. Despite applying for membership in 1966, the state would not be permitted to join the UN until the 1970s.¹⁸² It nevertheless actively sought to engage with intergovernmental agencies within the organisation. The UN Council on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) was one such organisation. The establishment of UNCTAD in 1964 and its proposals for a New International Economic Order (NIEO) in the 1970s grew out of the demand to replace the global economic system associated with Bretton Woods with one more equitable toward developing countries, improving terms of trade and promoting development

¹⁷⁹ PA AA MfAA A 17829, "Vorlage für die Aussenpolitisches Kommission des ZK der SED," 2.

¹⁸⁰ Ghana's Kwame Nkrumah and Indonesia's Sukarno both referenced the existence of two German states in their speeches. Robert B. Rakove, *Kennedy, Johnson, and the Nonaligned World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 78.

¹⁸¹ PA AA MfAA, A 18729, "Bericht über die Lage in Südost-Asien und über die Entwicklung der Beziehungen der DDR zu den südostasiatischen Staaten," 28.

¹⁸² Glenn Gray, *Germany's Cold War*, 189.

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assistance.¹⁸³ An APK session in November 1963 resolved that following “discussion regarding the advantages and disadvantages, it has been decided that a huge public struggle for equal involvement must be led.” This struggle would be supported by the COMECON nations, but also key “friendly states”: the UAR, India, Burma, Ghana, Mali, Ceylon, Indonesia and Yugoslavia.¹⁸⁴ The anti-imperialist nature of the proto-socialist world remained, at this point, a clearly demonstrable fact: the AKP interpreted the sixth session of General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), the so-called “Kennedy Round” as heralding closer capitalist integration as a response to the growth of the socialist world system and its close ties to the proto-socialist world: a sign both of US interests as well as the fact that “imperialist power over those still weak countries is becoming increasingly endangered” by these ties.¹⁸⁵

Despite positive developments, frustrations nevertheless lingered regarding the prospects of international recognition. In the years following the construction of the Berlin Wall and the great efforts made to promote the GDR's existence in Belgrade, the GDR had only achieved de facto recognition—mostly in the form of the establishment of trade missions and consulates—with four countries: Cambodia, Iraq, Yemen and Algeria.¹⁸⁶ In 1964 Ulbricht travelled to the Soviet Union to sign a treaty of “friendship, mutual support and cooperation,” which, by avoiding any mention of the Berlin question, signified an end to the Berlin crisis and a renewed effort on the part of the Soviets to help push for recognition of the GDR ahead of the second Cairo

¹⁸³ Johanna Bockman has claimed that UNCTAD and the NIEO were examples of actors from the socialist sphere and the proto-socialist world co-producing early economic forms of globalisation against the active opposition of the United States and the old colonial powers, but the evidence here suggests rather that the GDR was at best an awkward fellow traveller in this project. Johanna Bockman, “Socialist Globalization against Capitalist Neocolonialism: The Economic Ideas behind the New International Economic Order,” *Humanity: An International Journal of Human Rights, Humanitarianism, and Development* 6, no. 1 (2015): 109–28.

¹⁸⁴ SAPMO-BArch, DY 30/70834, “Protokoll der Beratung der Außenpolitischen Kommission am 25.10.1963,” 4-5.

¹⁸⁵ SAPMO-BArch, DY 30/70835, “Einschätzende Bemerkungen zur ‘Kennedy Runde’,” 12.

¹⁸⁶ Glenn Gray, *Germany's Cold War*, 147.

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Conference of Non-Aligned states. In its report on the treaty, the MfAA revealed the issues that were front of mind for GDR foreign policy experts: security and sovereignty, curiously emphasising the fact that the GDR was a “reality”: “The peace treaty establishes the borders of the GDR as a key factor securing peace in Europe...the GDR’s position as a sovereign and independent state has been strengthened. The GDR is a reality and an important factor for peace in Europe.”¹⁸⁷ The agreement had fallen short of what Ulbricht had wanted: a separate peace treaty ending World War Two to be signed unilaterally between the Soviet Union and the GDR in the absence of allied agreement. As an MfAA report from 1961 shows, sovereignty was at the heart of this desire; such a treaty would lead to generalised recognition worldwide, strengthen sovereignty, and “guarantee the inviolability of the GDR,” the report claimed.¹⁸⁸

If sovereignty was the problem, the proto-socialist world increasingly appeared to be the solution. The MfAA produced documents affirming the legalistic basis of de facto recognition; lists of countries that didn’t recognise the GDR and why; and argumentation documents to be sent to diplomats explaining how to argue that recognition of the GDR “wouldn’t deepen the division of Germany.”¹⁸⁹ When the German-Southeast Asian Friendship Society was set up in 1963, one of the key messages that it was to convey to both GDR and Southeast Asian citizens was, again, that the GDR was “reality.”¹⁹⁰ Specifically, to be conveyed to the Southeast Asian states was the fact that “the GDR is a sovereign state. It practices a rational and realistic politics. It claims for itself no more

¹⁸⁷ SAPMO-BArch, DY 30/70836, “Maßnahmeplan zur außenpolitischen Auswertung der Ergebnisse des Freundschaftsbesuches des Vorsitzenden des Staatsrates der DDR Walter Ulbricht in der Sowjetunion,” 2.

¹⁸⁸ PA AA MfAA A 15779, “Entwurf: Zur Frage der völkerrechtlichen Anerkennung der DDR bzw. der Aufnahme diplomatischer Beziehungen zu ihr,” 21.

¹⁸⁹ PA AA MfAA A 15779.

¹⁹⁰ Friendship societies were widespread across the socialist world, as acted as means of maintaining and administering mostly cultural links between nations. On friendship societies more broadly, see Rachel Applebaum, *Empire of Friends: Soviet Power and Socialist Internationalism in Cold War Czechoslovakia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2019), 115.

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or less than any other sovereign state in accordance with the rules of the UN charter.”

¹⁹¹ It is this kind of language that has led scholars claim that the GDR was born with a “legitimacy” deficit: no truly sovereign state feels the need to constantly reaffirm its sovereignty and no entity confident in the viability of their existence would persistently assert that it was a “reality.” But if this existential angst signalled recognition of a limitation, that limitation was to be found in a lack of sovereignty, not legitimacy. When nervous GDR “opinion researchers” seeking to obtain public views on the GDR and international issues sought to ascertain what GDR citizens thought of their state, they asked not if it was legitimate, but if GDR laws and policies were “expressions of the sovereignty of the GDR.”¹⁹² GDR elites needed recognition in order to perpetuate the idea that the GDR was a sovereign state; as long as the capitalist world would not provide this recognition, the GDR had to look to the proto-socialist world in order to find itself. This led to a curious orientation away from the countries immediate environs that even survived the GDR's gaining of recognition in the 1970s, a constant looking toward the proto-socialist world as a source of validity and recognition that lasted throughout the GDR's existence.

Beyond the rewards of political recognition, GDR elites—fearful of a world dominated by imperialism—saw it as paramount that these states be helped along the path toward real political and economic independence (from the capitalist world, at least) in a process that would make a safer and more secure world for socialism. As a co-ordinating body, the AKP produced plans that sought to co-ordinate the different wings of the foreign policy apparatus toward certain aims. One of these plans from 1959, which aimed at furthering GDR relation with African nations, stated that decolonisation was the world's most important contemporary issue. Gaining recognition from the newly

¹⁹¹ SAPMO-BArch, DY 30/68472 “Grundkonzeption für die Arbeit der Deutsch-Südostasiatischen Gesellschaft in der DDR,” 8.

¹⁹² SAPMO-BArch, DY 30/5202, “Bericht über eine Umfrage zu einigen Fragen der sozialistischen Demokratie,” 17.

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independent countries in Africa was an important policy priority, but it ranked behind others. Most important, according to the report (which again perceived issues of geopolitics through the lens of sovereignty), was “the support of the sovereign states of Africa through the securing and strengthening of their independence as well as the support of antiimperialist nation liberation movements in the colonial and dependant areas of Africa.”¹⁹³ This policy was tied to a notion that would eventually find expression—following its usage by Ghanaian leader Kwame Nkrumah in 1965—in the term “neo-colonialism.”¹⁹⁴ Socialist leaders were concerned that newly dependent nations extricate themselves from the “subjective” ties to colonial metropolises.

Great efforts were made to try and “untie” the postcolonial nations from their links to the metropole. Hermann Axen remembered that the demand emerged to “make these countries independent from the financial, market economic and cultural relations with the capitalists, to free them from the established closed-loop economies [*Wirtschaftskreisläufe*].” Such a demand “became a condition for the integration of these countries into the socialist world,” but with hindsight Axen wondered “if this was absolutely possible or even useful.” In a nod to the failures of *Störfreimachung*, Axen noted that “even for the socialist countries themselves, such independence was an unrealisable goal.”¹⁹⁵

“Honoured, Respected, Recognised”: the 1970s

In contrast with Western Europe, where the decade is often depicted as a dark denouement to the optimism and growth of the 1960s, for the elites of the GDR the

¹⁹³ PA AA MfAA A 17829, “Perspectiveplan zur weiteren Entwicklung der Beziehungen der DDR zu den afrikanischen Staaten,” 1.

¹⁹⁴ Nkrumah, *Neo-Colonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism*.

¹⁹⁵ Axen and Neubert, *Ich war ein Diener der Partei*, 402.

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1970s were something of a zenith.¹⁹⁶ Although developments in the proto-socialist world had been predicted to shift the balance of forces in favour of the socialist world, the 1960s had ended in disappointment. Political recognition proved difficult to obtain. A spate of recognitions came at the end of the decade: Iraq, Syria and Egypt all recognised the GDR following FRG recognition of Israel and Soviet support during Six-Day War; and they were joined by Cambodia, Sudan, and South Yemen. These recognitions came at great economic cost, however, as in every case the GDR had agreed to foot the bill caused by the loss of West German aid.¹⁹⁷ Beyond recognition, the effect that the proto-socialist world was having on the balance of power was turning out not to match the great hopes that had been placed upon it. Indeed, the role that these countries would come to play in the international balance of power turned out to be significantly more complex and diffuse than GDR theorists had envisaged in the early 1960s. The “objectively anti-imperialist” line would come to be challenged by the implacability of the Non-Aligned Movement, which fluctuated between support and criticism of socialist foreign policy directives. However, while GDR foreign policy experts saw international institutions like UNCTAD as opportunities to form broad, anti-capitalist fronts, they could also sow the seeds of doubt. As early as 1969 a report from the Institute for International Relations in Potsdam expressed fears that the growth of UNCTAD meant that the proto-socialist world was playing an increasingly important role in global affairs and that the socialist states had not yet responded with a unified position, noting that “the developing nations are increasingly placing the same demands and expectations upon the socialist world that they do on the capitalist industrial states.”¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁶ For an example of the contrast of the 1960s and 1970s in Western Europe, see: Tony Judt, *Postwar: A History of Europe Since 1945* (London: Penguin Press, 2005).

¹⁹⁷ Hermann Wentker claims that in all of these cases, these recognitions were as much about pleasing the Soviet Union as anything else. Wentker, *Aussenpolitik in engen Grenzen*, 317.

¹⁹⁸ DASR IIB 13211, “Thesen zum Standpunkt der DDR zur ‘globalen Entwicklungsstrategie’, 1; The division of the world into “North/South” was one of the most profound fears of GDR foreign policy actors, who went to great efforts to provide diplomats with the material needed to counter these arguments. See in particular a SED secretariat document produced in 1976

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Fears of a growing “North-South” divide corresponded to frustrations at the lack of pace in the development of GDR-South trade. At a meeting of the government’s UNCTAD committee in 1969, deputy foreign trade minister Eugen Kattner warned the committee that trade with the non-aligned world was much smaller as a percentage of total trade than that with the capitalist or socialist world. 62 percent of this trade was concentrated on four countries: Egypt, Syria, India and Brazil. Tellingly, however, Kattner warned that this percentage was not expected to rise in the coming years, despite the growing importance of raw material trade for the GDR.¹⁹⁹

These concerns would be swept away in the early 1970s, however. From existential crisis, the GDR had become *Geehrt–Geachtet–Anerkannt*, as a public placard photographed in Thuringia in 1974 read: “Honoured, Respected, Recognised.”²⁰⁰ Events had moved rapidly during the turn of the decade. In May 1971 Walter Ulbricht had been deposed in a Soviet-supported coup in favour of Erich Honecker who continued the process of *rapprochement* with the West that had begun in the late 1960s. An East German desire to overcome the restrictions of diplomatic isolation and gain access to increased trade and finance combined with Willy Brandt’s *Ostpolitik* and the global situation of détente and led to a series of inter-German negotiations culminating in the Basic Treaty [*Grundlagenvertrag*] that paved the way for diplomatic recognition and both states’ entrance into the United Nations.²⁰¹ The GDR had announced itself on

designed to help diplomats counter this position: SAPMO-BArch, DY 30/580049, “Massnahmen und Schlussfolgerungen aus den Ergebnissen der VII. UN-Sondertagung,” 3.

¹⁹⁹ DASR IIB 13211, “Protokoll der Sitzung des Regierungskomitees Welthandelskonferenz am 8. Mai 1969,” p.2

²⁰⁰ See photo by Thomas Hoepker at

<https://www.magnumphotos.com/newsroom/society/thomas-hoepker-ddr-ansichten-views-of-a-vanished-country/>, accessed 26/03/2019.

²⁰¹ On this process, see: M. E. Sarotte, *Dealing with the Devil: East Germany, Détente, and Ostpolitik, 1969-1973* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001).

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the world scene and now resembled something more of a “normal” state actor in the international system.²⁰²

Entrance to the UN and widespread recognition meant that the existential anxiety of earlier years reduced, or even disappeared. The discourse of solidarity, in contrast, grew. Gregory Witkowski has shown that usage of the term “solidarity” in the GDR press peaked in 1973, a year after entrance to the UN.²⁰³ At the same time, confidence in the impending collapse of capitalism was a common feature of foreign policy reports in early part of the 1970s.²⁰⁴ The GDR's foreign policy in the post-Hallstein era thus raises a question for the legitimacy thesis. If the GDR's engagement with the proto-socialist world was driven by concern regarding a lack of inner political legitimacy and the need to secure legitimacy from outside through the means of diplomatic recognition, why did it reach its zenith at a time when the GDR had gained almost universal political recognition and was at probably its most stable domestically?

The truth is that relations with the proto-socialist world were never solely about political recognition but were also tied to an ideological conception of a “balance of forces” determining that the healthier the global conditions for socialism, the healthier the GDR would be. In the Honecker era, having obtained recognition, GDR foreign policy shifted for a short period to a focus on helping shift this balance. That the height of the GDR's foreign policy confidence coincided with the decline of the Portuguese empire in 1975 was historical accident that would lead to strong GDR engagement with former Portuguese African colonies, particularly Mozambique and Angola. Beyond the opening that the “Carnation Revolution” had provided in these countries, it had also fit

²⁰² Scala uses the term “normal state actor” to describe the post-Basic Treaty GDR. Scala, “Understanding the Class Enemy,” 337.

²⁰³ Gregory Witkowski, “Between Fighters and Beggars: Socialist Philanthropy and the Imagery of Solidarity in East Germany,” in *Comrades of Color: East Germany in the Cold War World*, ed. Quinn Slobodian (New York: Berghahn Books, 2015), 73.

²⁰⁴ See for example planned research in 1972: BArch DC 204/43, “Direktive für die Erarbeitung des Forschungsplanes des Instituts für 1972.”

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into a pattern discerned by GDR foreign policy experts in the 1970s. Axen later remembered that the Portuguese revolution had played “an important role” in elite thinking. Not only had it shown that revolution could take place in a small, agrarian country, but it had also been led by a small group of army generals. These developments were part of a broader global trend, Axen noted, and what they “appeared to show was that we were arriving at a new moment, where not only the intellectuals, but also the military were joining the revolutionary movement—Nasser in Egypt, Assad in Syria, the Portuguese military.”²⁰⁵

For GDR foreign policy experts, the military was a welcome addition to the revolutionary party, seen as a necessary return to the Leninist concept of the revolutionary vanguard. The military also played an important role in thinking around détente. In the zero-sum logics of the balance of forces, détente was understood as the result, above all, of military parity which had been achieved by the 1970s between the two camps. As an IIB report would reveal, GDR foreign affairs experts saw the 1970s as the first time that “socialism gained the ability to truly effect international relations” through “the establishment of global and especially European military-strategic parity between socialism and imperialism.”²⁰⁶ This military parity would force the imperialist camp into accepting the reality and sovereignty of the socialist world. It combined with US failure in the Vietnam war to provide GDR ideologues with the sense that the general trend of global developments were moving inextricably in their favour. Asia, a MfAA report noted, had become the “focal point” [*Brennpunkt*] of international class conflict; notably it claimed that the Vietnamese victory was a “reflection” of deep changes in the

²⁰⁵ Axen and Neubert, *Ich war ein Diener der Partei*, 401.

²⁰⁶ DASR IIB 13135, “Zur Kategorie des internationalen Kräfteverhältnisses und Problemen seiner Entwicklung zu Beginn der 80er Jahre,” 6-8.

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international balance of forces in the favour of socialism, and not vice versa.²⁰⁷ In 1976 an MfAA report on Nasser and Egypt saw the Middle East following a similar trajectory:

The strengthening of world socialism and its continued support for the Arab national liberation movements has led to a meaningful strengthening of the position of progressive powers in the middle East in the last twenty-five years. The upswing in the Arab national liberation movements has led to important societal changes in Egypt, Syria, Iraq, Algeria and the People's Republic of Yemen. These countries are working in ever closer union with the socialist community of states, as well as holding increasing influence over the overall picture in the Arab world.²⁰⁸

This was the golden age of the socialist theory of “convergence.”²⁰⁹ Victories for progressive forces in Asia were seen by GDR scholars to herald the ever-closer union of these nations with the socialist world system, and in turn the countries of that system were increasingly seen to cohere.²¹⁰ Ideas regarding convergence seemed to correspond to confidence about the balance of forces, though as we shall see, they would mutate into something rather different in the 1980s. As a IIB report for 1976 would note, convergence between socialist states was an objective process, as well as being one that is “consciously shaped...Convergence [Annäherung] finds its expression in the blossoming of each socialist nation, and the strengthening of their sovereignty...[it] leads to the emergence of elements of collectively in their politics, economies, and social

²⁰⁷ PA AA, MfAA, MR-A 64, “Politische Orientierung über Asien nach dem Sieg der Völker in Vietnam, Laos und Kambodscha,” 1-2.

²⁰⁸ PA AA, MfAA, MR-A 70 “Aktuelle Probleme des Kampfes um eine politische Lösung des Nahostkonfliktes,” 1.

²⁰⁹ Not to be confused with later notions of a convergence *between* socialist and capitalist societies.

²¹⁰ Previous reports on Vietnam and Egypt both predicted closer “convergence” to the socialist state community.

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lives.” While this was a process that took place largely at the state level, it was also reflected in the “internationalization of experience” of individual workers in each socialist state.²¹¹

Running alongside the ideal and vision of socialist convergence was the key idea of the instability [Labilität] of capitalism. While the socialist world was gaining strength and converging, the capitalist world, so the argument ran, was weakening and splitting apart. Imperialism research in the 1970s frequently noted a growth of inter-capitalist rivalry between the three great “centres” of Japan, the US, and Western Europe.²¹² Throughout the twentieth century, Marxism-Leninism had passed through various stages of capitalist crisis theory. Lenin had famously depicted imperialism as the “highest,” and thus last stage of capitalist crisis that led to international war and a “worldwide revolutionary crisis...which, however prolonged arduous its stages may be, cannot end otherwise than in a proletarian revolution and in its victory.”²¹³ Stalin had continued to make impending intra-capitalist war the basis of Soviet foreign policy until his death; Khrushchev then replaced this with the policy of “Peaceful Coexistence,” maintaining that capitalist collapse was inevitable, though now through peaceful competition with socialism.

The expansion of the idea of convergence coincided with the growth of a professionalized foreign policy apparatus in the 1970s. According to Stephen Scala, the 1970s was a period of the “institutional completion of East German foreign policy expertise”; the foreign policy apparatus was “systematised,” so that it became a smoothly functioning production line running from the top of the SED down to the various

²¹¹ DASR IIB, 13211, “Problemstellungen für die Diskussion im Wissenschaftlichen Rat des IIB am 29.9.1976,” 2-4.

²¹² See for example a report from 1970 which saw “deepening contradictions” between imperialist states which was “emphasising their individual over their collective interests”: SAPMO-BArch DY 30/69641, “Analyse und Prognose des internationalen Kräfteverhältnisse und der Entwicklung der internationalen Beziehungen sowie die sich daraus Erfordernisse für die Außenpolitik und Außenwirtschaftspolitik der DDR bis 1980 - 1970,” 129-130.

²¹³ Lenin, *Imperialism*, 29.

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foreign policy institutions that now came to exist.²¹⁴ One product of systematisation was the creation in 1971 of the *Institut für internationale Politik und Wirtschaft*, or Institute for International Politics and Economics (IPW). The IPW was an amalgamation of various bodies: the State Secretariat for West German affairs, the German Institute for Contemporary History (DIZ) and the German Economic Institute (DWI).²¹⁵ These bodies were now bound together in a single institute that would be closely linked to the party and charged as the “leading body” for carrying out centrally coordinated “imperialism research.” As a discipline, imperialism research was heavily weighted towards analysis of developments in West Germany, but also came to encompass wider world trends, particularly analysis of the contemporary balance of forces.²¹⁶ A year into its existence, the executive office of the institute issued a directive that it should do more research into non-European areas, particularly the “position of developing countries in the capitalist world economy.”²¹⁷ In the era of confidence that was the 1970s, GDR imperialism researchers saw strong evidence of the impending collapse of capitalism. As a 1973 IPW book on the crisis of capitalism would claim, “developed capitalism means an ailing and dying capitalism.”²¹⁸ An IPW evaluation of its own research in response to the central research plan of 1975 noted that exceptional progress had been made “in the revealing of the increasing instability of imperialism’s system of political governance.”²¹⁹ These perceptions were deeply tied up with the idea that in the proto-socialist world things were moving the GDR’s way.

²¹⁴ Scala, “Understanding the Class Enemy,” 301.

²¹⁵ BArch DC 204/7, “Beschluss über die Auflösung des Staatssekretariats für westdeutsche Fragen und Bildung eines staatlichen Instituts für Internationale Politik und Wirtschaft,” 2.

²¹⁶ BArch DC 204/43, “Vorlage: Wissenschaftliches Profil des IPW.”

²¹⁷ BArch DC 204/44, “Hauptergebnisse der Präzisierung des wissenschaftlichen Profils in den Hauptabteilungen I und II,” 26.

²¹⁸ BArch, DC 204/1, “Konzeptionelle Thesen zum Buch ‘Die Krise der kapitalistischen Gesellschaft,’” 2.

²¹⁹ BArch, DC 204/13, “Bericht über die Realisierung des Zentralen Forschungsplans bis 1975,” 3.

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This short-lived period of optimism in the mid-1970s rapidly came apart at the end of the decade. It was only here that any real signs of a split in the Politburo with regard to relations to the proto-socialist world were detectable. One effect of the systemisation of the foreign policy apparatus was that the lines between foreign policy experts and practitioners, in discourse as well as function, began to become clearer. This is evident in the unravelling of the mid-1970s period of optimism from roughly 1977 onwards, which led to two quite distinct but correlative reactions among foreign policy elites and key party figures. The proto-socialist world took central place in this shift of thinking. A clique of leading SED politicians, most notably Günter Mittag and Alexander Schalck-Golodkowski, became convinced that the GDR had entered a severe balance of payments crisis for which the proto-socialist world was both a key cause and potential solution. Here we see a clear divergence from the rest of the socialist world: while the most important Soviet interventions in Africa came during this period, economic difficulty saw other states in the socialist bloc begin to withdraw support.²²⁰

In contrast, the GDR didn't withdraw from its obligations in the proto-socialist world or expand them but rather, shifted tone. One explanation is the GDR's response to the oil crisis that had begun in 1973, although its effects only started to kick in at the end of the decade.²²¹ André Steiner has claimed that until the end of his life Erich Honecker believed that the oil crisis was the principal cause of the GDR's demise: by 1979 it had already led Honecker to break with the old Soviet "two markets" theory in favour of acknowledgement of a single, international market.²²² Equally important and similarly decisive was the "coffee crisis" of 1977. The crisis had an important effect on GDR elites, confirming the global entanglements that the GDR faced and convincing

²²⁰ Westad, *The Global Cold War*, 250-88.

²²¹ On the oil shock and its long and short term effects, see Elisabetta Bini and Giuliano Garavini, eds., *Oil Shock: The 1973 Crisis and Its Economic Legacy* (London: I.B.Tauris, 2016).

²²² André Steiner, "'Common Sense Is Necessary.' East German Reactions to the Oil Crises of the 1970s," *Historical Social Research/Historische Sozialforschung* 39, no. 4 (150) (2014): 248.

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them of the need for change. It began in 1975 with a severe frost in Brazil which destroyed roughly half of the 1975–76 crop, driving up global coffee prices.²²³ This led to shortages which in turn led authorities to withdraw the standard coffee brand from the GDR market, leaving only the expensive “Rondo” variety and a new “mixed” brand, made up of 50 percent chicory. The situation caused outrage in the GDR, and was resolved only when Politburo member Werner Lamberz succeeded in cutting a barter deal with embattled Ethiopia, who agreed to exchange coffee for goods including *Dauerbrot*, a type of military ration.²²⁴

The shock of the coffee and oil crises led the SED set up a commission to analyse relations with the proto-socialist world which would become known as the “Mittag Commission,” thanks to its dominance by Günter Mittag, an important SED politician with connections foreign trade and the Stasi.²²⁵ Both Schalk-Golodowski and Mittag began pushing for something to be done about the GDR's worsening balance of payments situation in this period. Ironically, in the debt crisis, the GDR found itself in a very similar situation to many countries in the proto-socialist world, who were struggling to repay loans taken out in the early part of the decade. But despite their objectively shared positions, Mittag and the GDR instead looked to coordinate GDR foreign policy toward these nations in order to carry out what was known as an “export

²²³ Döring incorrectly states that the failed crop was in 1973: Hans-Joachim Döring, *Es geht um unsere Existenz: die Politik der DDR gegenüber der Dritten Welt am Beispiel von Mosambik und Äthiopien*. (Berlin: Links, 1999), 115; See: M.Y. Une, “An Analysis of the Effects of Frosts on the Principal Coffee Areas of Brazil,” *GeoJournal* 6, no. 2 (1982): 129–40.

²²⁴ Hans-Joachim Döring, *Es geht um unsere Existenz*, 115–23.

²²⁵ The full title of the commission: Kommission zur Koordinierung der ökonomischen, kulturellen, wissenschaftlich-technischen Beziehungen und der Tätigkeit im nichtzivilen Bereich in den Ländern Asiens, Afrikas und des arabischen Raumes, or the “Commission for the coordination of the economic, cultural and scientific-technical relations as well as activity in the non-civilian areas with the nations of Asian, Africa and the Middle East” may have also played a role in the usage of the Mittag-based shorthand.

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offensive” and to “maximise” hard currency profit from these relationships.²²⁶ For example Schalck-Golodkowski travelled to Mozambique in 1977 to examine the possibilities for trade co-operation, and the resulting joint enterprise operation at a coal mine in Moatize has been held up by scholars as an example of a shift away from an earlier focus on solidarity.²²⁷ Viewed similarly are the contract worker arrangements that were established with Angola, Mozambique and Vietnam in the 1980s, which sought to use cheap labour from the proto-socialist world for the benefit of the GDR.²²⁸

The Mittag Commission heralded a shift in tactics. Within the archival record there is little evidence of evidence of divergence within the elite on this. Hans Joachim Döring suggests that the Mittag Commission was a victory for the “economic wing” of the state, represented by Mittag, over the more “revolutionary, theoretical” side represented by Lamberz.²²⁹ This is difficult to square with some of the evidence: for one, Lamberz was a member of the commission. Secondly, Sara Lorenzini has claimed that the commission was a direct result of Lamberz’s belief that further integration with developing countries was the GDR’s way out of its economic crisis.²³⁰ It is certainly possible, however, to distinguish between Lamberz and Mittag, as well as Schalck-Golodkowski, who played an important role in the commission and was an important Mittag ally. On the one hand Lamberz was a committed internationalist; Andreas Malycha has described him as “Honecker’s personal ambassador in the Third World”

²²⁶ Mike Dennis, “Asian and African Workers in the Niches of Society,” in *State and Minorities in Communist East Germany*, by Norman Laporte and Mike Dennis (Oxford: Berghahn, 2011), 90.

²²⁷ Hans-Joachim Döring, *Es geht um unsere Existenz*, 153.

²²⁸ On this practice, see Damian Henry Tone Mac Con Uladh, “Die Alltagserfahrungen Ausländischer Vertragsarbeiter in Der DDR: Vietnamesen, Kubaner, Mozambiker, Ungarn Und Andere,” in *Erfolg in Der Nische? Die Vietnamesen in Der DDR Und in Ostdeutschland*, ed. Karin Weiss and Mike Dennis (Münster: LIT Verlag, 2005), 51–68.

²²⁹ Hans-Joachim Döring, *Es geht um unsere Existenz*, 47.

²³⁰ Sara Lorenzini, *Global Development: A Cold War History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019), 110.

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and was regarded by many as Honecker's eventual successor.²³¹ As a member of the Politburo and one-time leader of the agitation department, Lamberz didn't actually hold a formal position in relation to the proto-socialist world, but gained an important international role in the late 1970s in the Horn of Africa, negotiating the GDR's way out of the coffee crisis in 1977 and attempting to end the intra-socialist wars that had developed in the region during that period, developing a "sense of purpose...that he could save the Ethiopian revolution and with that help to propel a further spreading of communism in the Third World."²³² In contrast, Shalck-Golodkowski was seen as an un-ideological figure, who saw trade with the West as necessary and experiments in world revolution a distraction; as early as 1970 he had suggested the construction of "Free-trade Ports" in which "covered" GDR firms could operate and trade with blacklisted regimes such as South Rhodesia.²³³ In any case, if there was a conflict brewing it would soon be cut short: Lamberz died less than three months after the establishment of the Mittag Commission in a helicopter crash in Libya, where he had been attempting to negotiate an end to the Ethiopian-Eritrean war. Axen, another idealist, took over his role, and noted the "obligation" to fulfil the aims that Lamberz had struggled for.²³⁴ Throughout all this however, the unity of the party and the ideological language they used remained intact.

In Times of Fading Light: the 1980s

²³¹ Malycha, *Die SED in der Ära Honecker, Machtstrukturen, Entscheidungsmechanismen und Konfliktfelder in der Staatspartei 1971 bis 1989*, 132.

²³² Malycha, 134.

²³³ Judt, *Der Bereich Kommerzielle Koordinierung*, 244.

²³⁴ Malycha, *Die SED in der Ära Honecker, Machtstrukturen, Entscheidungsmechanismen und Konfliktfelder in der Staatspartei 1971 bis 1989*, 136.

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“Up until this point, the strategy of the communist parties has not brought the expected results,” explained a damning report that found its way to Erich Honecker’s desk in February 1988. Written by a group of scholars from the academy of sciences and party officials from the department for international relations in consultation with the Bulgarian Communist Party,²³⁵ the report detected negative developments in the balance of forces: “the end of the 1970s and beginning of the 1980s saw a particular weakening of the socialist position in the balance of forces in the majority of non-socialist countries” the writers noted. Some parties faced the “acute danger,” of becoming “meaningless or disappearing.”²³⁶ Socialist strategy was partly at fault: there had been too much focus on the experiences of building socialism in the Soviet bloc; the Soviet Union had been too “mechanistic” in its demands; too harsh on deviation from Marxism-Leninism; and had underestimated the importance of independence among socialist parties in the proto-socialist world. For a long time, the report noted, “the oversimplification that the socialist revolution would automatically resolve all problems has ruled.”²³⁷ In the capitalist world the development of the subjective conditions for social revolution appeared bleak, and the report concluded that a “revolutionary situation” would not develop there in the contemporary era.²³⁸

The perceived realities of crisis in the socialist world led to marked changes in the language of foreign policy reports in the 1980s, and this went hand-in-hand with hard-nosed decisions regarding relations with the proto-socialist world. However, this didn’t necessarily mean foreign policy in regard to these nations underwent a “de-

²³⁵ The report originated at a meeting of the Warsaw Pact secretariat for ideological and international questions the previous year, where the SED and Bulgarian Communist Party were tasked with producing a “deep analysis” of the next steps for the international communist movement. SAPMO-BArch DY 30/69633, Letter from Axen to Honecker, 11.02.88.

²³⁶ SAPMO BArch DY 30/69633 “Analyse der Kampfbedingungen und Entwicklungsprobleme der kommunistischen und Arbeiterparteien, der kommunistischen Weltbewegung” 16.

²³⁷ *ibid.*, 18.

²³⁸ *ibid.*, 28.

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ideologisation.” Rather, it was ideology that shifted in response to events. Slowly, the idea faded that the proto-socialist world would be “reserves of strength” for the GDR, and the sweeping generalisations of the objective anti-imperialism thesis were dropped as a category and replaced with the quasi-Trotskyist concept of “uneven development.” Following the lead of Mikhail Gorbachev’s “New Thinking” in the Soviet Union, class was dropped as an explanatory framework and replaced by a concern for “universal humanist” issues, and experts on proto-socialist world began to speak, like their counterparts in Western NGOs, about problems of poverty and development in the “Third World” instead of revolution and anti-imperialism.

The IPW thus came to be an important force in convincing elites that the balance was beginning to swing in favour of the imperialist world. After the *Wende*, Hermann Axen remembered that the earlier belief that the socialist world could “surround” the imperialist world with the help of the proto-socialist world became unstuck. “In the foreground of the conflict was the economy. And there we were not prepared.” A “technological war” had developed, Axen claims.²³⁹ This “technological war” was a key subject for the IPW; and while early IPW reports repeatedly emphasised the crisis-prone nature of capitalism²⁴⁰ the tone began to shift in the late 1980s. Capitalism’s ability for adaptation [Anpassung] became a key part of IPW discourse, but the new “realities” continued to be framed in fundamentally ideological language. Socialist theorists retained the concept of the balance of forces, and began to suggest that it was undergoing a temporary but profound shift toward the imperialist world. This was seen primarily as a result of developments in what was called the “scientific-technological revolution,” or STR. The STR was an almost ubiquitous concept in communist theory regarding societal development: Stefan Guth has argued that it existed as a sort of socialist

²³⁹ Axen and Neubert, *Ich war ein Diener der Partei*, 354–55.

²⁴⁰ See for example planned research in 1972: BArch DC 204/43, “Direktive für die Erarbeitung des Forschungsplanes des Instituts für 1972.”

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equivalent the idea of technocracy in the West.²⁴¹ During the Cold War Sovietologists suspected that the STR was an ideological development brought about in order to push Leninist arguments about the relationship between technology and social change. “If the main driving force of historical development is technological progress,” two scholars argued in the 1970s, “then one has to qualify the Leninist requirement that the proletariat fight class-war regardless of the level of technological development.”²⁴² In the 1980s, however, scholars in the GDR began to do precisely that.

Reports throughout the 1980s argued that the capitalist world was making important strides ahead in terms of utilizing the STR. An IPW report from 1985 noted that there existed “deficiencies in the scientific-technical development of COMECON countries” in various fields, but remained optimistic that these could be eliminated.²⁴³ By the end of the decade however, this optimism had disappeared, and it was leading to radical suggestions for GDR foreign policy. By 1989 the *volte face* was set in stone. The capitalist world, an IPW report noted, had made “a rapid stride ahead in scientific-technical progress” which had seen them take “leading positions in various fields.” The report predicted serious challenges for the socialist world in the 1990s. Its proposed remedies were surprising. “Backlogs,” it claimed, “are not to be tolerated...particularly in regard to international cooperation. The solution cannot be autarchy or worldwide economic isolation because this cannot bring the necessary growth, productivity and effectiveness needed. Rather what is needed is an optimal use of the international

²⁴¹ Stefan Guth, “One Future Only. The Soviet Union in the Age of the Scientific-Technical Revolution,” *Journal of Modern European History* 13 (January 1, 2015): 357.

²⁴² Arnold Buchholz and T. J. Blakeley, “The Role of the Scientific-Technological Revolution in Marxism-Leninism,” *Studies in Soviet Thought* 20, no. 2 (1979): 145.

²⁴³ SAPMO-BArch DY 30/69643 “Die Grundtendenzen der internationalen Entwicklung des Kräfteverhältnis in der Welt,” 32.

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economic relations in order to strengthen the nation and international position of socialism.”²⁴⁴

Experts thus began to suggest that the socialist world look to forms of cooperation with the capitalist world in order to bridge growing gaps between them. A working group document from the IIB in 1988 would claim that the “historically and traditionally conditioned” unity of Europe meant that it would make sense for an “all-European” form of cooperation, which would equitably divide infrastructure and raw materials.²⁴⁵ Proposals for “collective security” and “collective economic solutions” to global problems, including European solutions to the crises of the proto-socialist world, suggested that GDR elites had begun to look elsewhere for the strength that would prop up their ailing sovereignty: Western Europe. Attempts were even made to make overtures to a sort of pan-European solidarity *against* the US. An IPW report from 1987 in preparation for international meetings suggested that US protectionism, the effect of a weak dollar on European exports in the latter half of the decade, and high US interest rates were damaging both capitalist and socialist Europe.²⁴⁶

By the 1980s it was clear that the explosive results of inter-capitalist rivalries had failed to materialise.²⁴⁷ Instead, GDR theorists were confronted by a mutual debt crisis on the

²⁴⁴ BArch DC 204/205, “Entwicklungstendenzen der Ost-West Wirtschaftsbeziehungen unter dem Einfluss des wissenschaftlich-technischen Fortschritte,” 1-2.

²⁴⁵ DASR IIB 13211, “International Studies in the German Democratic Republic,” 18.

²⁴⁶ BArch DC 204/91, “Aspekte Ökonomischer Sicherheit unter den Bedingungen des Ringens um umfassende internationale Sicherheit,” 24.

²⁴⁷ As the capitalist world was its primary area of study, scholars at the IPW frequently worked with colleagues in the Western world and travelled to the West. This cooperation gained pace during the Gorbachev era. An obvious question is to ask whether a similar process was taking place here to the one Robert English described in the late Soviet Union, whereby groups of experts who became “exposed” to the West returned to the East as a sort of “Westernizing elite.” Did impressions of the West contribute to the perception that it was becoming less crisis prone? It is difficult to say. Reports written back home almost always presented negative impressions. One scholar who had worked for three months at the East-West Security Studies Institute in New York would claim that “no serious research” was done there, scholars views were “primitive,” and that you could learn more in one day of an East-West conference than you could in weeks at the institute. BArch DC 204/29 “Bericht über Aufenthalt am Institute for East-West Studies,” 3; On the Soviet case, see Robert English, *Russia and the Idea of the West*:

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part of both the socialist states and the proto-socialist world. If capitalism was proving itself to be less susceptible to crisis than previously thought, the very nature of the proto-socialist world was being called into question. The division of the world into constituent imperialist and anti-imperialist parts no longer seemed to make sense: if the proto-socialist world could no longer be relied upon to help mount a successful encirclement of imperialism, then a *modus vivendi* would have to be found with imperialism itself. The result of this shift was a decade-long process of reassessing the GDR's international relations. What is perhaps most striking about this shift is how these reports challenge understandings of the Cold War as a bipolar, ideational conflict between two directly opposing, contradictory camps.

This sense of instability did not pass GDR theorists by. In the 1980s the concept of “uneven development” emerged and was combined with a recognition of the increasing “interdependence” of the world. In contrast with the ideas of the 1960s, it had come to be recognised that globalization, as an IPW report from 1987 noted, could be also negative because it “internationalises the contradictions and negative tendencies of capitalism.”²⁴⁸ The economic sphere, the report noted, appeared increasing as a “complex web of interests inside both societal systems as well in the global economy and global politics,” but this web, instead of producing convergence, was creating “uneven weighting and uneven dependencies.”²⁴⁹ With regard to the proto-socialist world, the report writers were negative: “It is not to be overlooked that the developing countries are firmly anchored in their economic dependency on the capitalist industrial nations, and no advance in the overcoming of this dependency is to be observed. Judged by their

Gorbachev, Intellectuals, and the End of the Cold War (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000).

²⁴⁸ BArch, DC 204/91, “Gemeinsame Sicherheit und Friedliche Koexistenz,” 7. .

²⁴⁹ *ibid.*, 8.

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economic potential, the weight carried by the socialist countries in international economic relations is still low.”²⁵⁰

The growth of the unevenness concept was not only an interesting contradiction of early doctrines regarding the objectivity of anti-imperialist struggle, but also a rare departure from heterodox Marxism-Leninism. Its roots can be traced back to the late 1970s, when foreign policy experts began to claim that a “sharpening of class struggle” had been brought about by imperialist response to socialism’s increased strength in the international sphere. As an MfAA report on the Middle East from 1976 claimed, this sharpening of class struggle was happening both in the inner class composition of states and between states in the international system. The fragile alliances laid out in the Moscow Declaration were beginning to show signs of disintegration. In particular, sections of the so-called “national bourgeoisie— which the Moscow Declaration had deigned to be part of the anti-imperialist movement by virtue of their competition with international capitalist interests—were increasingly splitting into imperialist and anti-imperialist camps.”²⁵¹

By the mid-1980s the concept had become fully fledged. A long, damning, confidential report produced for the central committee in 1985 outlined the issue in great detail. The situation in the proto-socialist world was increasingly defining global politics, the report noted, but this was no longer a completely positive development. In the 1980s, the report noted, “economic and political processes in the developing countries are taking place in increasingly embittered and difficult circumstances.” Increasing indebtedness “limited their political sovereignty,” and economic dependence on the capitalist world was growing. However the defining feature was uneven development, which was articulated thus:

²⁵⁰ *ibid.*, 10.

²⁵¹ PA AA MfAA MR-A 70, “Aktuelle Probleme des Kampfes um eine politische Lösung des Nahostkonfliktes.” On the “national bourgeoisie,” see Friedman, *Shadow Cold War*, 72.

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Characteristic of the developing countries in this period is the rapid advancement of processes of uneven economic development...Parallel to the uneven economic development is a growing socio-political differentiation. The societal direction of development, the worsening of living standards of wide levels of the population, the deepening of social contradiction and conflict, the growing financial difficulty and a growing dependence on foreign capital have increasingly clear effects on the foreign policy of many of these countries...The process of uneven economic political and social development in African, Asian and Latin American states has rapidly grown in the last view years. The political leadership from roughly 20 developing countries have orientated themselves toward a number of self-defined, singular, diverse and idiosyncratic forms of socialism (Islamist, African, etc). These forms are not scientific socialism, but national-religious concepts.²⁵²

The thesis was important because it represented an acknowledgement of the inadequacy of the “objectively anti-imperialist” notion of the proto-socialist world. In one sense, it was simply a recognition of the complexity of the proto-socialist world and acknowledgment that previous socialist policy had sought to flatten this complexity. In doctrinal terms, it was a radical departure from Marxist-Leninist orthodoxy. A 1987 report on global interdependence was a striking example of how thinking had shifted on the proto-socialist world. Three years before Anthony Giddens would claim that globalization “fragments as it coordinates,”²⁵³ the report would make a similar claim: “our world becomes more unified and contradictory at once.” The “Third World,” the report noted in a telling shift of terminology, no longer represented a hotbed of revolutionary ferment, rather, it was becoming a place where mass hunger was causing

²⁵² SAPMO-BArch, DY 30/69643, “Potenzen und Perspektiven der Entwicklungsländer Asiens, Afrikas und Lateinamerikas in der internationalen Klassenaueinandersetzung, insbesondere im Kampf um Frieden, Abrüstung und sozialen Fortschritt,” 2-9

²⁵³ Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), 175.

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“virulent source of social ‘explosion’ which is causing chain reactions across the globe.” A global solution—which included the imperialist world—was needed.²⁵⁴

Again, this shift did not necessarily mean an emptying of ideological content. For a start, the reforms of the 1980s were conceived of by Gorbachev not as an abandonment of Marxism-Leninism but rather a return to Leninist values.²⁵⁵ GDR theorists who claimed a new world of interdependence similarly harked back to Lenin.²⁵⁶ Leninism was the “immortal, infallible, perpetually renewed body of the sovereign-party—the body that transcended individual mortal bodies of its every member and leader” as Alexei Yurchak has noted, meaning that it was common to represent any ideological shift as a return to his true values.²⁵⁷ A commitment to Marxism survived the passing of the belief in the revolutionary potential of the proto-socialist world, and indeed its passing was framed in fundamentally Marxist terms. “The working class in developing countries” one pessimistic report noted, “remains in most cases a class that develops ‘it itself’ [an sich] and the formation of a working class that develops ‘for itself’ [für sich] is still forthcoming.”²⁵⁸ The issue itself was discussed by GDR foreign policy experts, and an IPW report on the Soviet concept of “de-ideologisation” in 1988 concluded that while there was unity that “negative clichés and bogeyman imagery” ought to be dispensed with, this didn’t mean “the renunciation of ideological values nor the negation of the fundamental ideological disunity between socialism and capitalism.”²⁵⁹

²⁵⁴ BArch DC 204/91, “Globalität,” 5.

²⁵⁵ This argument is made in William Taubman, *Gorbachev: His Life and Times* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2017).

²⁵⁶ One report, for example, quoted Lenin on the “objective tendency” for the “collective economic, political and spiritual life of humanity to increasingly internationalise.” BArch, DC 204/91, “Globalität,” p.8

²⁵⁷ Alexei Yurchak, “Bodies of Lenin,” *Representations* 129, no. 1 (February 1, 2015): 146-47.

²⁵⁸ SAPMO-BArch, DY 30/69643, “Potenzen und Perspektiven der Entwicklungsländer,” 19.

²⁵⁹ BArch, DC 204/91, “Zur Entideologisierung der internationalen bzw. zwischenstaatlichen Beziehungen.”

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The reports produced in this era do not chime with the depictions of the GDR as a last holdout of Marxist-Leninist orthodoxy. By 1989 GDR theorists were openly suggesting that capitalism could not be overcome. As one internal IPW report noted: “The conditions of class struggle in the capitalist countries must be analysed with rigour. It is becoming clear that the determination of perspectives and strategic goals can no longer depend upon the expectation of an unavoidable collapse of capitalism.” Believing that capitalism must inevitably decline, the report noted, obscured not only its abilities for development and adaptation [Anpassung], but also the possibility “for a peaceful and reform-friendly development stage for capitalism as a historical bridge for future transitions to socialism.”²⁶⁰ This of course was months before the end of the Cold War. A year earlier, however, a joint report written in 1988 by the GDR's Institute for Politics and Economics (IPW) and the University of Hamburg's Institute for Peace Research and Security Policy could speak a number of global issues that transcended the Cold War divide, such as “the underdevelopment of the ‘Third World’ and the increasing impoverishment of the majority of the world population; the environmental threat toward the continued existence of humanity and the question of responsible usage of resources.” The report went on to discuss the “internationalisation of economic life,” which demanded “unhindered” and “equitable” access to world markets.²⁶¹ Even earlier, another report produced by the IPW, entitled “Globality: the Fundamental Condition for Contemporary Thought and Action,” could claim it an “irrefutable necessity” that “a mode of global thought and action need to be developed, which moves beyond the current fixation on the division of the world into constituent parts and takes as its point of departure a global unity, and the demands that this unity produces.”²⁶² Throughout the 1980s one can find evidence that GDR foreign policy elites had given

²⁶⁰ SAPMO-BArch DY 30/6937, “Zum Imperialismus der Gegenwart,” 7.

²⁶¹ BArch DC 204/91, “Gemeinsame Sicherheit und Friedliche Koexistenz,” 18.

²⁶² BArch DC 204/91, “Globalität: Grundzug heutigen Politischen Denkens und Handelns,” 12.

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up on the idea of socialist transformation worldwide. To take one example reported by Stephen J. Scala, when diplomat Hans-Georg Schleicher was dispatched to his ambassadorial post in Zimbabwe in 1983, the then head of the International Relations department of the SED Günter Sieber echoed Konrad Adenauer in issuing Schleicher a warning against carrying out any more “failed experiments in socialism.”²⁶³

It is important to note here that much of this shift in ideology stemmed from the Soviet Union. Indeed, some of it was lifted directly from Gorbachev's shift away from a foreign policy centred around class toward one based on “humanistic universalism,” as Archie Brown has named it.²⁶⁴ Nevertheless, it is surprising that these terms were being used in the foreign policy institutes of the GDR as opposed to those of the Soviet Union. And it was all the more striking a volte-face because of the GDR's previous focus on the proto-socialist world.

How much of an effect did this shift have? In his work on foreign policy elites Stephen J. Scala argues that this change in thinking didn't find fertile ground within the GDR leadership, which continued to tow the line of Marxist-Leninist orthodoxy.²⁶⁵ It is certainly true that it is difficult to detect a major shift in ideological stance on behalf of the GDR leadership: the banning of critical Soviet journal *Sputnik* in 1988 and Kurt Hager's famous dismissal of Soviet reforms to *Stern* magazine are notable pieces of evidence for this.²⁶⁶ It is clear that Honecker in particular predicted the dangers that the new course could pose to the GDR's viability. Honecker and Gorbachev's meetings in the 1980s provide a fascinating insight into this stance. Both had their eyes on the global

²⁶³ Scala, “Understanding the Class Enemy,” 483.

²⁶⁴ Archie Brown, *The Gorbachev Factor* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 220.

²⁶⁵ Scala, “Understanding the Class Enemy,” 510.

²⁶⁶ Asked about Soviet reforms, Hager responded rhetorically: “If your neighbour changes his wallpaper in his flat, would you feel obliged to do the same?” As Thomas Kunze has shown however, Hager himself began to agitate for reforms shortly after making the comment. Thomas Kunze, *Staatschef a.D.: die letzten Jahre des Erich Honecker* (Berlin: Ch. Links Verlag, 2001), 20.

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dimension of reforms, which were necessary, as Gorbachev told Honecker in Moscow in 1988, because “the example of the Soviet Union is increasingly being used abroad as evidence the ineffectiveness of socialism as a societal order...[without reforms] the effect on the longevity of the Soviet Union, of global socialism, would be grave.”²⁶⁷ Honecker paid lip-service to the need for reform, but appeared startled and alarmed by Gorbachev’s new policy. In one striking conversation he reminded Gorbachev that “the question of reform is one for the Soviet Union, but it comes with problems for the GDR, because the ideals of Marx, Engels and Lenin are indivisible: just as before, the cry from the ‘Communist Manifesto’—‘proletarians of all lands, unite’— remains.”²⁶⁸

Without formally adopting a new strategy, GDR foreign policy shifted in the latter half of the 1980s. The proto-socialist vision had failed, but one of the key instrumental reasons underpinning the importance of this vision—the GDR’s unstable sense of sovereignty—remained. This meant that while the hopes for international revolution had faded, the GDR could not afford to withdraw support for its allies in the former proto-socialist world. In the late 1980s, the GDR for the first time began to carry out foreign policy completely independently of the Soviet Union. From the mid-1980s, the Soviets were happy to withdraw from conflicts in the proto-socialist world in the hope of creating better relationships with the West.²⁶⁹ Indeed, Gorbachev at points seemed to have become exasperated with Soviet engagement in these areas.²⁷⁰ But, the GDR continued, for example, to aid the Sandanista government in Nicaragua even when the Soviets pulled out.²⁷¹ In May 1989 Haile Mengistu Mariam visited East Berlin as the Soviets

²⁶⁷ SAPMO-BArch, DY 30/2388, “Niederschrift des Gesprächs des Genossen Erich Honecker mit Genossen Michail Gorbatschow,” 52.

²⁶⁸ *ibid.*, 61.

²⁶⁹ Georgi I. Mirski, “Soviet-American Relations in the Third World,” in *Turning Points in Ending the Cold War*, ed. Kiron K. Skinner (Stanford: Hoover Press, 2007), 149–50.

²⁷⁰ After the 1986 Yemen crisis, Gorbachev reportedly asked advisors repeatedly what the Soviets were doing there. Quoted in Westad, *The Global Cold War*, 382.

²⁷¹ Klaus Storkmann, “East German Military Aid to the Sandinista Government of Nicaragua, 1979–1990,” *Journal of Cold War Studies* 16, no. 2 (2014): 66.

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were scaling back support for the Ethiopian leader.²⁷² As Klaus Storkmann has shown, GDR support for Nicaragua and Ethiopia actually *increased* as the Soviets scaled it back, in a “conscious counter-position” to that of the Gorbachev, with ministry of defence reports showing that military support (encompassing weapons delivery, medical treatment and training) for “developing countries and progressive national liberation movements” almost doubled between 1987 and 1988.²⁷³ Co-operation with Namibian liberation movement SWAPO continued right through until 1990.²⁷⁴ Even when the GDR scaled back support for the People’s Democratic Republic of Yemen after a coup there in 1986, this was done in direct refusal of Soviet orders to continue relations with the new regime. Instead, the GDR leadership insisted that relations would only continue when its old Yemeni allies were released from prison, which happened in 1989.²⁷⁵ In the late 1980s GDR policy in the proto-socialist world appeared to involve steadfast loyalty to existing socialist states, while retaining scepticism regarding the appearance of new ones: changing, while clinging on.

Conclusion

Eugen Ruge’s semi-autobiographical novel, *In Times of Fading Light*, tells the story of an East German family’s loss of faith in the communist ideal spans across three generations. The climax of the novel centres around the ninetieth birthday of Wilhelm

²⁷² Winrow, *The Foreign Policy of the GDR in Africa*, 310.

²⁷³ Storkmann, *Geheime Solidarität*, 593, 616–17.

²⁷⁴ See for example, the literature of the Namibian children educated in the GDR Carola Dorner, “Gemeinschaftsgefühl im ‘Ossi-Klub’: Die ‘DDR-Kinder’ von Namibia,” in *Ostalgie international: Erinnerungen an die DDR von Nicaragua bis Vietnam*, ed. Thomas Kunze (Berlin: Ch. Links Verlag, 2012).

²⁷⁵ Miriam M. Müller, *A Spectre Is Haunting Arabia: How the Germans Brought Their Communism to Yemen* (Berlin: transcript Verlag, 2015), 351.

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Powleit, an SED functionary and patriarch of the family, and a symbol of the GDR gerontocratic elite. To his grandson, the event appears to be a “party of dinosaurs...croaking at each other with great animation, as if they had all just been awoken from their fossilized prehistoric rigidity and were catching up with everything they had failed to say for millions of years.”²⁷⁶ The title is taken from a Russian family member’s reminiscences of the potato harvest season in the Soviet Union, but serves as a placeholder for a generational loss of faith that climaxed in the late 1980s. This story of how communists reacted to the realisation that the world was not turning their way—that the light was fading—is of central importance to the history of state socialism.

This is not just a story of disillusionment, however. Indeed, for much of the GDR’s existence, foreign policy elites presented the proto-socialist world as the key to its future. The apparent simplicity of the thesis of “objective anti-imperialism,” as well as the notion that these states were mere cogs in a game of domestic legitimacy building, has obscured the great lengths GDR elites went in attempting to understand historical developments in the proto-socialist world, as well as the importance they placed on their findings. The GDR’s geopolitical precarity meant that it constantly looked for sources of sovereignty abroad; in the 1960s and for most the 1970s this took the form of convergence with the “socialist world system” and the renewed hopes for socialist development in the proto-socialist world. But by the 1980s evidence of convergence and the idea that the postcolonial nations of the south were “objectively anti-imperialist” had faded, and disappeared along with the GDR at the end of the decade.

²⁷⁶ Eugen Ruge, *In Times of Fading Light* (Faber & Faber, 2014), 203.

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Where do correct ideas come from? Do they drop from the skies? No. Are they innate in the mind? No. They come from social practice, and from it alone.

Mao Zedong¹

The African workers' movement needs cadres who are trusted with the tasks of union work and the bear the academic worldview of the working class.

Herbert Warnke, FDGB chairman, 1961²

Introduction

At some point in 1964 the staff at the FDGB *Hochschule* in Bernau, a suburb of Berlin, received a letter from Arnolis Appuhamy, a member of the Politburo of the Communist party in Ceylon and General Secretary of Ceylon's Revolutionary Trade Union. Appuhamy had come to study at the *Hochschule* the previous year, and remembered his time there fondly:

¹ Mao Tse-Tung, "Where Do Correct Ideas Come From?" 1963, https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-9/mswv9_01.htm.

² SAPMO-BArch, DY 79/408, Speech by Herbert Warnke at the opening of the Institute for foreign students, 6.

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We came at harvest time in September and left during the beginning of summer last year. Most of us came from tropical countries. In the first May we observed how the foliage of the trees coloured themselves red, yellow and brown, how the trees lost their leaves, and how those leaves formed a carpet on the ground. Soon however, the seasons changed. This change was for us a symbol of the development of the country we found ourselves in...The first delicate sprouts of sweet spring trees, which shot up from under bare trees and bare earth, were like the first achievements of the building of a new Germany. And as we left the country after the joyous celebrations of May, as the earth bore its magnificent summer clothes, we took with us the symbol of a blooming flower and Germany's happy future.³

Appuhamy's letter would have been pleasing to the institute leaders not only because of his obvious fondness of his time there, but also because of his presumably intentional linking of this enjoyment to a developmentalist framework. The *Hochschule* had set up its institute for foreign students in 1959, just one of a number of new institutions that grew up in rapid response to the shock of decolonisation during this period. Alerted to the revolutionary potential of decolonisation, the FDGB created an institute that would help the GDR shape the proto-socialist world by producing a global cadre of Marxist-Leninist trade unionists, indebted to the GDR and cognizant of its theories of development.

In contrast to the previous chapter's focus on the subjective elements of a global ideology, this chapter will assess the everyday life of these ideas, zooming in to individual classrooms to show the nuts-and-bolts of the GDR's turn to the proto-socialist world during the early 1960s. The trade unionists who came to study in Bernau in this period were mostly drawn from the cohort of historical actors who had inspired this turn: figures at the forefront of anticolonial activism or postcolonial leadership in Africa. The institute and the courses it taught were designed explicitly for them. The content of this teaching,

³ SAPMO-BArch, DY 79/403, Letter from Senfleben to Felgentreu, no date.

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then, reveals much about the turn itself: its ideological basis and the political hopes that guided it. By analysing this material, we can further understand what the GDR hoped for the proto-socialist world. In turn we see how the intended subjects of this turn reacted to it, providing early signs of the rifts between what GDR elites had hoped to find in the proto-socialist world, and what was actually there.

While student exchange has become one of the better-researched areas within the historiography of the GDR, those who have studied it have principally done so through the lens of social history, reconstructing the varieties of “everyday” experience and analysing questions of racism, living conditions, contact with local populations, or consumption. Such accounts are necessary reminders of what one author has called the “limits of internationalism,” highlighting how official discourses of anti-racism often belied a latent racism in both socialist society and state policy.⁴ This study however, is more interested in the success and failures of the FDGB's pedagogical model.⁵

⁴ Damian Mac Con Uladh's dissertation on foreigners' experiences in the GDR makes several references to the experiences of students at the institute, for example, mostly focusing on living conditions and racism. Mac Con Uladh, “Guests of the Socialist Nation?,” 81, 103, 197; The phrase “the limits of internationalism” is Maxim Matusevich's. Both Matusevich and Julie Hessler have focused African student's experience of racism in the Soviet Union Maxim Matusevich, “Probing the Limits of Internationalism: African Students Confront Soviet Ritual,” *Anthropology of East Europe Review* 27, no. 2 (2009): 19–39; Julie Hessler, “Death of an African Student in Moscow: Race, Politics, and the Cold War,” *Cahiers Du Monde Russe* 47, no. 1/2 (2006): 33–63; On racism in the GDR, see Sarah Pugach, “African Students and the Politics of Race and Gender in the German Democratic Republic,” in *Comrades of Color: East Germany in the Cold War World*, ed. Quinn Slobodian (New York: Berghahn Books, 2015).

⁵ Two recent studies have also investigated the early years of the school. Eric Angermann's 2018 master's thesis similarly looks at the third cohort, and the broader period surrounding the school's founding, in great detail. Focusing on the *Handlungsspielräume* (scope of action, or freedom to act) of the students, Angermann argues that despite their ability to protest against experiences of racism and other concerns, they remained tightly restricted by the wide-ranging power of the SED and its mass associations. Eric Angermann, “Ihr gehört auch zur Avantgarde'. Afrikanische Gewerkschafter an der FDGB-Hochschule Fritz Heckert (1961-1963)” (Master's Thesis, Georg-August-Universität Göttingen, 2018); A 2018 article by Immanuel R. Harisch also studies the experiences of African students at the school in the 1960s. Harisch focuses on “individual experience” in light of the “official script...[of] anti-imperialist solidarity,” showing how complaints about racism in particular put this script under strain. Immanuel R. Harisch, “Mit gewerkschaftlichem Gruß! " Afrikanische GewerkschafterInnen an der FDGB-Gewerkschaftshochschule Fritz Heckert in der DDR,” *Stichproben. Wiener Zeitschrift für kritische Afrikastudien* 18, no. 34/2018 (2018): 77; These studies have greatly enhanced our understanding of educational exchange in the GDR, moving beyond simplistic accounts that

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This chapter builds on these discoveries, taking a global lens to the FDGB files to reconstruct the ideological debates during a hugely important period of the global Cold War, the early 1960s. The institute would serve the turn to the proto-socialist world both by shaping events there through the creation of a trade union cadre, and by harvesting knowledge about events and processes within the proto-socialist world. These students are thus a particularly insightful object of study; unlike others who came to study from abroad for academic degrees at regular GDR universities, those at the institute were taught a bespoke course designed for them. The FDGB strictly monitored what they called the “ideological-political situation” among the students, leaving behind a wealth of information that gives insight into the nature of the turn to the proto-socialist world, as political project, and the way those drafted into it—in this case, students from abroad—reacted to it.

The early years of the institute’s existence highlight the importance of Africa to the “turn” to the proto-socialist world. The rapid period of decolonization on the continent that coincided with the second Berlin crisis was, as we will see, of paramount importance to the founding of institutions and organisations that would eventually come to take the whole of the proto-socialist world as their remit. The slow abandonment of the pan-German solution to the GDR’s crisis of sovereignty, which began at the turn of the decade and was completed by its end, is also in evidence here. The “German question” was a key topic at the *Hochschule*, albeit one that the students found difficult to understand, or even irrelevant. Here, then, we see a tension between the old policy of orientating the GDR toward a socialist unification of Germany, and an emerging new one, orientation toward the proto-socialist world.

have either reduced it to an attempt to “indoctrinate” students, or those who have claimed educational exchange was a non-ideological, purely pedagogical exercise. For example see Winrow, *The Foreign Policy of the GDR in Africa*, 49; or Rupprecht, *Soviet Internationalism after Stalin*, 194; We now know, as Eric Burton has convincingly displayed, that students coming to the GDR were both “politicised and politicising agents.” Eric Burton, “Navigating Global Socialism: Tanzanian Students in and beyond East Germany,” *Cold War History* 19, no. 1 (January 2, 2019): 63.

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The Sino-Soviet split also came into focus during this period. As Quinn Slobodian has argued, this split had profound effects within the GDR in the 1960s, suggesting that “dichotomous interpretive schema of capitalism/communism, or the notion of an “East-West conflict, are insufficient to deal with what was in fact a triangular conflict by the 1960s.”⁶ Slobodian has shown how Maoist ideas proved popular among Latin American and Asian students mostly in the latter part of the decade.⁷ Maoism found fertile ground, too, among the mostly African students in the FDGB *Hochschule* in the earlier part of the decade. Jeremy Friedman has called the global struggle between Maoism and Soviet-informed visions of global communism a “shadow Cold War,” and the evidence presented here confirms Friedman’s thesis regarding the ideological nature of this conflict as well as his contention that the 1960s saw Maoism gain ground by emphasising a militant anti-imperialism in opposition to the Soviet notion of peaceful coexistence.⁸ The popularity of Maoism serves to highlight the students’ agency in response to demands for ideological conformity, a demand that, as we have seen, GDR foreign policy theorists would later bemoan.

The FDGB, Decolonisation, and the Turn to the Proto-Socialist World

The FDGB began teaching students from the proto-socialist world in 1959 and in the following 30 years would go on to educate roughly 4,400 trade unionists from 93 different states. Funding for the institute was supplied by the FDGB, in large part through solidarity donations collected by the union from GDR citizens, a practice which

⁶ Quinn Slobodian, “The Maoist Enemy: China’s Challenge in 1960s East Germany,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 51, no. 3 (July 1, 2016): 258.

⁷ Slobodian, 647–49.

⁸ Friedman, *Shadow Cold War*, 219.

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will be explored in the next chapter.⁹ In the early period of the school, for which statistics are available, the vast majority of students were male; just four of the 112 students from the third cohort were female, and only two of these students completed the course.¹⁰

The original intention was to site the institute in Leipzig in what had become an informal centre of extra-European-related study in the GDR, through the opening in 1960 of the Africa Research Institute at the Karl Marx University and also the Herder Institute in 1956, a language institute that offered intensive German courses for foreign students, many of whom came from the proto-socialist world. The first course for the FDGB, consisting of seven months of language teaching and ten of subject study, opened in 1959 at a facility in Leipzig-Leutzsch. The cohort was mainly Algerian, with five students from sub-Saharan Africa.¹¹ The FDGB national board then ordered the founding of an institute devoted to foreign students in April 1960, and hosted 15–20 Congolese students on a three–month course from June.¹² The second cohort, consisting of roughly 85 students from both Anglophone and Francophone Africa and 15 Italians, began in September.¹³ While the institute's definition of “foreign” was broad, and occasionally included European students, the focus was mainly on students from Africa and Asia. In early years, as we will see, African students dominated intake. While the main course of study at the institute was named the *afro-asiatischen Lehrgang*, or “Afro-Asian course,” internal documents frequently only mentioned “African” students, or discussed the need for more knowledge on conditions in Africa, with Asia receiving

⁹ In 1964, for example, donations funded over half of the institute's funds. See SAPMO-BArch, DY 79/405, Letter from Weber to the *Hochschule*, no date.

¹⁰ Angermann, “‘Ihr gehört auch zur Avantgarde’. Afrikanische Gewerkschafter an der FDGB-Hochschule Fritz Heckert (1961-1963),” 55.

¹¹ SAPMO-BArch, DY 79/183, Letter from Heinz Deutschland to the FDGB Department for International Relations, no date, 1.

¹² SAPMO-BArch, DY 34/24696, “Bildung des Institutes für das Studium ausländischer Gewerkschaftsfunktionäre,” 2.

¹³ SAPMO-BArch, DY 79/183, Letter from Werner Raase to the Secretariat of the FDGB, 23.06.1960.

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scant attention.¹⁴ The first few courses were dominated by African students, with the numbers of students from the Middle East increasing in the middle of the decade. Latin American students also attended from the 1970s onward.¹⁵

The institutes that were set up in the late 1950s and early 1960s were thus designed both to learn about *and* to shape the proto-socialist world. On a pragmatic level GDR elites hoped to influence events in an area increasingly in flux, and there was also recognition of a lack of knowledge regarding the proto-socialist world. As GDR foreign policy experts would later admit, the state had focused too much on domestic issues in its first decade.¹⁶ As well as training a cadre of GDR-friendly trade unionists, the institute's founding documents stated that it should carry out "research in the area of international relations," meaning that teachers at the institute would also have research profiles.¹⁷

In the GDR the FDGB took on much of the responsibility for these initiatives. This sat well with the FDGB's existing task of helping to bring about the new "socialist personality" through worker education, particularly in the workplace. It was also a product of the institutional decentralisation of the GDR's relations with the nations of the proto-socialist world, which in lieu of a devoted ministry were spread across various ministries and mass organisations (principally the FDGB and the Free German Youth, *Freie Deutsche Jugend*, or FDJ). As will we see in Chapter Three, the FDGB was the principal mediator through which GDR citizens would experience the proto-socialist world and the numerous GDR initiatives directed toward it. As its chief,

¹⁴ See for example SAPMO-BArch, DY 34/24696, "Bericht und Schlußfolgerungen für die Tätigkeit des Ausländerinstituts der Hochschule der Deutschen Gewerkschaften „Fritz Heckert.“"

¹⁵ See for example the expanded remit to include students from Africa, Asia, and Latin America in SAPMO-BArch, DY 79/2521, "Grundorientierung für das Studienjahr 1977-8."

¹⁶ Heyden, GDR Development Policy in Africa, 37.

¹⁷ DY 34/24696, "Sekretariatsvorlage: Betr. Bildung des Institutes für das Studium ausländischer Gewerkschaftsfunktionäre," 1.

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Herbert Warnke, would explain in 1964, “The struggle for self-determination, state sovereignty, against foreign intervention...cannot only be fought by individual factories or the FDGB leadership, but instead must become an issue for the entire organisation.”¹⁸ In the era of the Hallstein doctrine the FDGB also played an important outward role as a means of establishing relations with organisations and nations in the proto-socialist world without triggering the wrath of the FRG. It was the FDGB, for example, that first developed relations with the African National Congress (ANC) in South Africa, inviting a delegation to Berlin in 1963.¹⁹ At the beginning of 1960 the presidium of the national executive board of the FDGB issued a declaration of solidarity with the workers and unionists of Africa, declaring that they shared the same “spirited, freedom seeking goal, as well as the same enemies.”²⁰ Warnke made a heavily publicised trip to Ghana and Guinea in the spring of the same year, during which Guinea—temporarily—agreed to recognise the GDR.²¹ Throughout the year the FDGB would establish contact with over 30 labour organisations in Africa.²² Attendance at the university was arranged through agreements between the FDGB and these unions. Through the handing out of scholarships the FDGB hoped it would create class-conscious “friends of the GDR” who would go on to further the international communist cause and become leading trade union functionaries in their own countries.²³

¹⁸ Ilona Schleicher, “Die Solidarität der DDR mit dem ANC während des Rivonia-Prozesses 1963/64,” in *Engagiert für Afrika: die DDR und Afrika II*, ed. Ulrich van der Heyden (LIT Verlag, 1994), 110.

¹⁹ Schleicher, 112.

²⁰ SAPMO-BArch DY 79/408, Speech given by Warnke at the opening of the institute, 2

²¹ See report on the trip in “Gewerkschafter aus 7 Ländern Afrikas applaudierten Herbert Warnke,” *Neues Deutschland*, 26. February 1960, 7; and the announcement of diplomatic recognition, “Diplomatische Beziehungen DDR-Republik Guinea,” *Neues Deutschland*, 6. March 1960, 1; On Guinea’s subsequent withdrawal of recognition, see Glenn Gray, *Germany’s Cold War*, 107–15.

²² Heyden, GDR Development Policy in Africa, 46.

²³ SAPMO-BArch, DY 79/488, “Ausbildung von Funktionären.”

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In the eyes of FDGB leaders, creating a cadre of Marxist-Leninist trade unionists was especially important, given conditions on the ground throughout the African continent. Typically these conditions were understood through a framework that privileged class as a causal and explanatory factor in historical development. While it seemed clear that (as a resolution produced the federal board of the FDGB's department for international relations noted in early 1960) an "anti-imperialist consciousness" was on the rise on the continent, with the African working class playing an important role within this rise, it was nevertheless estimated by the writers of the report that this class constituted a mere three percent of the continent's population.²⁴ The situation regarding political parties was not promising either. At the beginning of 1960 the GDR only recognised five communist parties in Africa: the Moroccan, Tunisian, Algerian, and Sudanese communist parties, and the African Independence Party in French West Africa.²⁵ Given the absence of either a sizable African proletariat or the vanguardist parties that would be required in their absence, the report noted that trade unions had "great responsibilities."²⁶ This focus on trade unions as arbiters of change was a politically astute move: contemporary research has highlighted their importance in bringing about decolonization in French and British African colonies.²⁷

²⁴ SAPMO-BArch, DY 79/406, "zur Arbeit des FDGB und seiner Gewerkschaften nach Afrika," 2. See also this figure being repeated by African students in SAPMO-BArch, DY 79/184, "Bericht über die Konsultation zum Thema ‚Grundfragen zur Entwicklung einer menschlichen Gesellschaft,“ 1.

²⁵ A number of unrecognized communist parties also existed at this point. See the inside cover image of Zentraler Ausschuss für Jugendweihe in der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik, *Der Sozialismus- deine Welt*. (Berlin: Verlag Neues Leben, 1977) Both the Tunisian and Algerian parties would be banned in 1962, and the African Independence Party would split into several parties along with the colonial federation it was founded in later that year.

²⁶ SAPMO-BArch, DY 79/406 "zur Arbeit des FDGB und seiner Gewerkschaften nach Afrika," 2.

²⁷ Frederick Cooper for example argues that decolonization was driven in part by the growth of organised labour in the 1930s and 1940s, which in turn forced both empires to attempt to "modernize" their colonies and create a pliant, trade unionised industrial working class. This attempt proved a costly failure, precipitating the metropolitan abandonment of both empires. Frederick Cooper, *Decolonization & African Society: The Labor Question in French and British Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

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The arriving students were also important sources of information for GDR elites, and were extensively interviewed regarding the current political situation in their countries upon arrival in the GDR, with the information passed up the FDGB chain of command.²⁸ In the mid 1960s, the federal board of the FDGB repeatedly stressed that the *Hochschule* was to be a “research centre for the national executive board of the FDGB...in the area of developing countries.”²⁹ Academic staff at the *Hochschule* were to be experts in this field, and, through research and travel to the proto-socialist world, were to produce knowledge that would be fed through to the top of the FDGB network.

The students were also deployed to help increase GDR citizen’s support for the orientation to the proto-socialist world. As a 1961 report noted, the school’s “outward” [nach aussen] work was a particularly important function, although the theme of international legitimacy was conspicuously absent here.³⁰ Workers, the report noted (quoting Lenin), cannot only be won over with “propaganda and agitation.” Instead, it was important to use the students as symbolic assets that would win over the GDR population *itself* to the idea of international solidarity: “the appearance of the students at forums, worker’s debates etc. helps the process...[and] supports the FDGB with its task of educating and growing the class consciousness of its members, particularly in securing their friendship with the liberation movements of African peoples. Through this, conceptions of solidarity will be profoundly deepened.”³¹ The students were thus conceived of as a physical accompaniment to what Quinn Slobodian has called “the visual ephemera of East German Internationalism.”³² By way of example, in May 1961

²⁸ See for example SAPMO-BArch, DY 79/184, “Gespräch zwischen dem Lehrerkollektiv mit den ersten 4 Kollegen aus die Kongo.”

²⁹ See for example SAPMO-BArch, DY 79/488, “Anweisung an die Fakultätsleiter.”

³⁰ SAPMO-BArch, DY 79/184 “Bericht zur Lehrarbeit an der Gewerkschaftshochschule,” 3.

³¹ *ibid.*

³² Quinn Slobodian, “Socialist Chromatism: Race, Racism and the Racial Rainbow in East Germany,” in *Comrades of Color: East Germany in the Cold War World*, ed. Quinn Slobodian (New York: Berghahn Books, 2015), 28.

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the FDGB department of culture requested that African students “of varying skin colours (brown/black)” could be made available to take part in the third *Arbeiterfestspiel*, or “workers’ festival,” a yearly cultural event involving amateur and professional performances. The students were asked to fly flags, repeat the phrase “peace will defeat war,” and take part in a dance, if possible in clothing “typical of their home countries.”³³

As symbols of socialist internationalism intended for domestic audiences, sources of research, and a new international trade union cadre, the students that attended the *Hochschule* were important early agents of the globalising forces that were growing between the socialist world and the proto-socialist world during this period. As trade unionists involved in decolonisation struggles, they represented a segment of an advanced class of actors who were shaping the proto-socialist world at a time of particular flux. They were thus important historical actors, but were also being *acted upon*, in that the FDGB, while hoping to make them conscious, creative applicants of Marxism-Leninism who would help usher in the global transformation of capitalism to communism, hoped as well to deploy them as symbols of people's friendship for the population of the GDR at large.

Creating a Proto-Socialist Cadre: the Founding of the Institute

The turn to the proto-socialist world was rapid, matched only by the pace of change in Africa that had precipitated it. For the institute, the period 1959–1960 was beset with difficulties. It was clear that the operation had been rushed, and the school suffered from poor facilities, with teachers showing insufficient knowledge on the topics they were supposed to be teaching. A report from the school leadership to the FDGB

³³ SAPMO-BArch, DY 79/183, Letter from Kober to Felgentreu, 12.5.61.

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national executive at the end of 1960 outlined a series of problems that would become typical: students were not familiar with the basics of Marxism-Leninism and had difficulties in applying this knowledge to the concrete conditions in Africa, particularly with regard to applying analysis of “class struggle and class conditions” to their home contexts. The report criticised a “lack of care” on the part of the teaching staff, who hadn't paid enough attention to the obscure nature of Marxism in Africa. The imperialism of the FRG, the leading role of workers and unionists in the struggle, the unity of the working class and of different national liberation movements were all deemed unsatisfactorily emphasised. One of the key problems was that many of students had received their primary education in mission schools, and thus exhibited “reformist” opinions.³⁴

A perceived lack of preparedness on the part of the students would continue to plague the institute in its early years. But as we will see later with regard to the influence of Maoism, it was not only opinions formed prior to arriving in the GDR that proved problematic: the very fact of being in the GDR also opened the students up to dangerous influence in the eyes of the FDGB. The shift to Bernau from the originally proposed site in Leipzig was justified thus in a 1960 report to the FDGB secretariat:

The FDGB can only carry out its great responsibility...when the education of these cadres is carried out with care for the basic of political, economic, and social conditions that apply in these countries. At the same time the education of these unionists in the GDR must be given the furthest possible security from the risk of political and ideological damage from class enemies. The last few months have shown that if the institute remains far away from the *Hochschule*, such conditions cannot exist.

³⁴ SAPMO-BArch, DY 34/24696, “Information über einige Fragen der politisch-ideologischen Lehrtätigkeit und Betreuung Institut für das Studium ausländischer Gewerkschaftsfunktionäre Leipzig-Leutzsch,” 1-2

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The concentration of foreign students at a state level in Leipzig, and the thus unavoidable deep alliance formed between our foreign unionists with the foreign students at the different state institutions there led to an inconvenient ideological influence. Due to the concentration of students in Leipzig the class enemies were particularly active in their work.³⁵

While it is unclear from the report exactly who the class enemies being railed against here were, later concerns regarding students' exposure to Maoist literature suggests that this might have been an early example of the influence of Chinese propaganda. As the Sino-Soviet split deepened in the coming years, FDGB authorities' deep suspicion regarding uncontrolled contact between foreign groups become apparent, alongside a concern for ideological purity. Berlin, too, would pose risks in this regard, as we will see. Such concerns were an early sign of something that would later become a theme of the GDR's engagement with the proto-socialist world. Being "open" to organisations, nations, and people deemed sympathetic to socialism while attempting to shut off hostile capitalist influence may have made sense on paper to a generation still operating under the influence of the "two camps" theory of international relations, but it crumbled in the face of the reality of exchange within a globalised world. By establishing cross-continental educational exchange programs, GDR officials hoped to bind together the socialist world and newly decolonised nations. But the act of forging these connections simultaneously created ruptures as students became exposed to ideas they may not otherwise have come across in their home countries.

The institute moved to a new building in the campus of the FDGB *Hochschule* in Bernau on 3 January 1961. The building, which had been built in the *Bauhaus* style during the Weimar era as a school for the General German Trade Unions Federation, was set up for the training and education of trade unionists in the GDR shortly after the

³⁵ SAPMO-BArch DY 34/24696, "Antrag auf Verlegung des Instituts von Leipzig nach Bernau," 2-3

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end of the war. The chairman of the FDGB, Herbert Warnke, spoke at the opening, articulating the FDGB's interpretation of how the school fitted in to contemporary global currents of change. Noting that “a third of the earth has been freed” by the national liberation movements “under the leadership of the working class,” Warnke claimed that the “global power balance is shifting toward peace, democracy and national independence.”³⁶

Much of Warnke's focus was devoted to West Germany. Acknowledging German colonial atrocities in Africa, he attempted to draw a direct link to contemporary West German practices: “The German imperialists led four campaigns in their African colonies, in which 75,000 Africans were murdered. The whole Herero people were eliminated...Today the German imperialists practice a neocolonial politics...They attempt to continue the economic exploitation of the African peoples with new methods.”³⁷ The legacy of German colonialism remained a spectre throughout the GDR's engagement with African countries in particular. The GDR authorities mostly sought to portray the FRG as representing a continuation of the colonial past in contrast with the GDR, which was seen to be a decisive break. In this, they were helped by the fact that many West German organisations that dealt with Africa had colonial roots.³⁸ Othering the German history of colonialism was not always simple, however. When, after the *Wende*, Hans-Georg Schleicher interviewed members of SWAPO, the Namibian national liberation movement, several of them suggested that the colonial legacy was an important factor in East German decision making.³⁹ In Namibia, a former

³⁶ SAPMO-BArch, DY 79/408, Speech by Herbert Warnke at the opening of the Institute for foreign students, 03.01.1961, 1.

³⁷ *ibid.*, 5

³⁸ Britta Schilling, *Postcolonial Germany: Memories of Empire in a Decolonized Nation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 92.

³⁹ See for example the claim from one former SWAPO activist that GDR officials were always “forthright” in their dealings, which may have been the result of a consciousness of the colonial legacy. SAPMO-BArch, SgY 46/6, Interview with Obed Emvula, 4.

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colony that had been known as German South West Africa, SWAPO would receive extensive support from the GDR in their struggle for independence from South Africa. As we have seen in the previous chapter, GDR support for SWAPO continued right until the very end of the Cold War, with Namibia achieving independence just months before the GDR was dissolved.

Teaching at the institute was divided into five key areas, as laid out in a 1960 outline of the curriculum. The first was that of the basics of class politics. The education received at the institute was supposed to produce cadres who both thought and acted in terms of class and class struggle, with particular reference to the notion of “national democracy,” an alliance between the working classes, the peasantry, and a “national bourgeoisie”—a subset of the bourgeoisie that had no connections to imperialist circles—which was laid out in the Moscow Declaration.⁴⁰ The second area was imperialism and neo-colonialism. Particularly important here were critiques of the USA and West Germany, and the notion of neocolonialism: the idea that imperialism still constituted a threat to the proto-socialist world after decolonisation via economic domination. The clearest manifestation of such economic domination was capitalist aid.⁴¹ The third area was the attempt to develop histories of the nations and continents of the proto-socialist world which emphasised workers’ and unionist movements, and to link these with global, socialist movements.⁴² The fourth was the importance of the “Great Socialist October Revolution” as a turning point in global history, and the concept of the “socialist world system” with the Soviet Union at its head. Key here was the hierarchisation of global struggles, with the FDGB putting the Soviet Union at the top, but also pointing to

⁴⁰ SAPMO-BArch, DY 34/24698, “Bildung eines Instituts für das Studium ausländischer Gewerkschaftsfunktionäre,” 1.

⁴¹ *ibid.*, 2.

⁴² *ibid.*, 2.

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themselves as exemplars to be followed.⁴³ The fifth was the organisational principles of Marxist-Leninist trade unions.⁴⁴

Courses generally lasted 18 months, with seven to eight set aside at the beginning for German language teaching and the rest devoted to what was called a “basic unionist education.” At the end of the year a written exam was taken, followed by what was described as “a comradely discussion” on the topics. The goal of the exam was, to quote the official guidelines: “to establish how the students have understood the theoretical problems and if they are capable of drawing the right conclusions for trade union work.”⁴⁵ The exam was based on the 5 areas listed above. Students had to answer a selection picked from 44 preset questions, which included basic questions on Marxist political economy (“How does surplus value occur?”); class relations (“explain why an alliance between the peasant-worker (*werktätigen Bauern*) and the working class is necessary”); neocolonialism (“Why is neocolonialism an expression of the weakness of imperialism?”); the importance of the Soviet revolution (“What importance does the Great Socialist October Revolution have for the National Liberation Movements?”); the socialist world system: (“Prove the growing advantage that the socialist world system boasts over the capitalist system”); the importance of national liberation movements (“What importance do the national liberation movements have in our epoch?”) and revolutionary trade union theory (“What defines a revolutionary trade union?”)⁴⁶

⁴³ *ibid.*, 3.

⁴⁴ *ibid.*, 4.

⁴⁵ See both SAPMO-BArch, DY 79/439 “Beratung für die Prüfungskommission,” and SAPMO-BArch, DY 79/439, “Vorschläge für die Vorbereitung und Durchführung der Prüfungen.”

⁴⁶ *ibid.*

Postcolonial Taxonomies: Teaching the Non-Capitalist Development Path

The institute files help us understand how leading GDR functionaries saw and understood the world during the early period of decolonisation. In this, the GDR largely took the lead of the Soviet Union. Hope M. Harrison's history of GDR Soviet relations points out that the leaders of the GDR—Ulbricht in particular—never truly accepted the leading Soviet policy doctrine of peaceful coexistence, due to their belief in the necessity of maintaining a belligerent standpoint toward West Germany.⁴⁷ Despite these concerns, however, peaceful coexistence was a key component of the teaching at the institute. In 1956 Khrushchev had (re)introduced the concept at the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU).⁴⁸ The idea's core premise—that nuclear proliferation had made war with the capitalist world unthinkable and that instead the socialist world's growing strength would see it overtake the capitalist world economically—had trumped the older, Leninist notion of the inevitability of war between capitalism and communism. The Cold War would thus—in theory at least—increasingly be fought as a battle of ideas. The doctrine was seen to be applicable to the newly emerging nations of the proto-socialist world in that disarmament would free up much needed funds. As FDGB chief Herbert Warnke told students at the opening of the institute, peaceful coexistence meant “the collective will to end nuclear proliferation,

⁴⁷ Khrushchev had urged the SED to engage with closer cooperation with the West German SPD under the cover of peace coexistence, something Ulbricht was unwilling to do. Harrison, *Driving the Soviets up the Wall*, 77.

⁴⁸ Many scholars present peaceful coexistence as an invention of Khrushchev's. See for example Jeremy Friedman: Friedman, *Shadow Cold War*, 25; The term, however, originated with Lenin and was used sparingly in the Stalin period to call for an end to anti-Soviet aggression from capitalist states. Khrushchev's advocacy of the concept was a stark deviation from this line. See Paul Marantz, “Peaceful Coexistence: From Heresy to Orthodoxy,” in *The Dynamics of Soviet Politics*, ed. Paul Cocks, Robert Vincent Daniels, and Nancy Whittier Heer (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1976), 293–305.

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disarmament and the redeployment of the funds saved for social gain and development.”⁴⁹

Development, specifically what was known as the “non-capitalist development path,” was another leading concept in the FDGB worldview. In an influential article on GDR solidarity practices, Toni Weis has argued that in the GDR the Western concept of “development” was replaced with the notion of “solidarity.” The official GDR position, according to Weis, was that development was a “necessary consequence of the contradictions inherent in any pre-communist socio-economic system and could not be accelerated from the outside” and thus was replaced by the notion of solidarity.⁵⁰ In fact, however, development was highly important in GDR conceptions of the proto-socialist world: theorists in the GDR developed a highly complex taxonomy of so-called development paths, which claimed different paths for different nations according to their class makeup and policies. By the mid-1970s, theorists saw 20 nations which were of “socialist orientation,” which meant that they had chosen to adopt a program for “national-democratic revolution” as prescribed in the Moscow Declaration of 1960.⁵¹ On the other hand, some states in the proto-socialist world were on capitalist development paths, which was defined by three features: a leading role for the “national” bourgeoisie, the beginnings of the development of a capitalist mode of production, and entrapment within the international capitalist division of labour. Within this path, there existed three different levels of development, ranging from “least developed” to “developed.”⁵² Importantly, the setting of a nation upon the capitalist development path

⁴⁹ SAPMO-BArch, DY 79/408, Speech by Herbert Warnke at the opening of the Institute for foreign students, 03.01.1961, p.3

⁵⁰ Weis, “The Politics Machine: On the Concept of ‘Solidarity’ in East German Support for SWAPO,” 357.

⁵¹ Spanger and Brock, *Die beiden deutschen Staaten in der Dritten Welt*, 126; GDR theorists argued among themselves whether a socialist orientation was the same thing or represented a different phase to the “non-capitalist development path.” See *ibid.*, 126-127.

⁵² *ibid.*, 115-118

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was not produced “inherently” but could be changed from the outside; this happened with Syria for example, which GDR theorists saw as diverging from a “disintegrated” capitalist path toward a path of socialist development with the Neo-Ba’athist coup of Salah Jadid in 1966.⁵³ Perhaps even more importantly, capitalist development in the proto-socialist world was seen to skew toward the eventual development of socialism. As academic N. S. Babintseva would argue in the GDR’s flagship journal covering the proto-socialist world, *Afrika, Asien und Lateinamerika*, while it was clear that the transition from colonial to the postcolonial “leads to the emergence of capitalism,” this was accompanied in the proto-socialist world by a tendency for nationalization which “creates very important internal conditions for the future emergence of socialism in the liberated countries, by a) ‘socialising’ production and thereby preparing the material conditions for socialism; and b) introducing both the possibility and some features of restrictions on private property into productive relations.”⁵⁴

The school’s curriculum placed a heavy emphasis the non-capitalist development path. As a report noted in 1961, it was a fundamental component of what the students were to be taught, with the aim of preventing “a long capitalist development path and allowing for the direct transition from feudalism to socialist revolution.”⁵⁵ The non-capitalist development path represented precisely what Weis claims that GDR officials had argued against: an acceleration of development stages. The details of the path were codified in November 1960 at the International Meeting of Communist and Workers Parties in Moscow, which had produced the Moscow Declaration, a document which would guide much of what was taught at the school during this period. Specifically, for the proto-socialist world the document elucidated the notion of “National Democracy” as the officially proscribed doctrine for newly independent states. Jeremy Friedman has

⁵³ Spanger and Brock, *Die beiden deutschen Staaten in der Dritten Welt*, 99.

⁵⁴ *ibid.*, 368n115

⁵⁵ SAPMO-BArch DY 79/184, “Bericht über die Auswertung der Moskauer Erklärung.”

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argued that the introduction of this concept, which replaced the doctrine of 'People's Democracy' as introduced in eastern and central Europe after World War Two, was a “significant step toward the Chinese position...[the new doctrine] did not entail the dictatorship of the proletariat, but, under benevolent conditions and with the proper political line buttressed by the activism of all progressive forces led by Communists, it could serve as a 'transitional stage' to the non-capitalist path of development for the liberated colonies.”⁵⁶ Key to the new doctrine was the idea that a “national bourgeoisie” could form a component of a “progressive alliance” as long as it was “unconnected with imperialist circles...objectively interested in the principal tasks of anti-imperialist, anti-feudal revolution, and...retains the capacity of participating in the revolutionary struggle against imperialism and feudalism.”⁵⁷

The introduction of the Moscow Declaration was treated with utmost importance by the functionaries running the *Hochschule*. In January 1961 the first head of the institute, Werner Raase, was removed by the secretariat of the FDGB. As Eric Angermann has shown, Raase's removal was in part driven by complaints on behalf of the students regarding his leadership style, including accusations of racism.⁵⁸ Beyond these concerns, however, a report by the new leadership listed a lack of proper analysis of the Moscow Declaration among his failures.⁵⁹ A further report in March claimed that the previous leadership was guilty of a “particular schematism” with regard to the evaluation of the declaration. In particular, teachers had not shown enough faith and trust in the socialist world system, and had not successfully transmitted the “solution of national democracy

⁵⁶ Friedman, *Shadow Cold War*, 57.

⁵⁷ “Statement of 81 Communist and Workers Parties Meeting in Moscow, USSR, 1960”, accessed 9 January 2017, <https://www.marxists.org/history/international/comintern/sino-Soviet-split/other/1960statement.htm>.

⁵⁸ Angermann, “‘Ihr gehört auch zur Avantgarde’. Afrikanische Gewerkschafter an der FDGB-Hochschule Fritz Heckert (1961-1963),” 43.

⁵⁹ SAPMO-BArch DY/79/184, “Bericht zur Lehr- und Erziehungsarbeit im Institut.”

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as the summary of the new process of revolutionary transition from capitalist to socialism in a tactical formulation” to the students.⁶⁰

As we have already seen, the institute displayed a particular focus upon Africa in the early years. This focus was Janus-faced. On the one hand, leaders of the institute were guilty of eliding difference within the continent, with blanket references to “African conditions” common. On the other, the institute served as an attempt to taxonomize the dynamic contemporary situation in the proto-socialist world, mapping it onto Marxist-Leninist concepts of developmental stages. Marxism was deemed to have found much more fertile ground in West as opposed to East Africa, for example, and a report from 1963 suggested that African students were divided into two groups: “North and West” (specifically Morocco, Algeria, Ghana, Guinea, Mali, Nigeria, Senegal) and “East and Central” (Kenya, Tanganyika, North & South Rhodesia, Congo).⁶¹

Invitations to students were arranged through connections with trade unions in the proto-socialist world and co-ordinated by the FDGB’s region-specific sectors: these invitations were also dictated in large part by notions of development. The organisation of these sectors themselves is telling: responding to the growth in the FDGB’s international work in the 1960s, they were reorganised into the following subdivisions: socialist countries, capitalist countries, Africa, Asia, and Latin America.⁶² The students were organised into delegations based on their country of origin and each delegation was prescribed specific ideological tasks according to their “ideological-political development stage.”⁶³ The delegations deemed most important were decided, as a

⁶⁰ SAPMO-BArch, DY 79/184 “Bericht über die Auswertung der Moskauer Erklärung.”

⁶¹ SAPMO-BArch, DY 79/246, “Perspektivplan für das Ausländerstudium,” 4.

⁶² Further sectors included the department for relations with international organisations, the department for “foreign information” [Auslandsinformation] which was introduced in 1978 and controlled the production and dissemination of foreign propaganda, and departments for “fundamental issues” [Grundsatzfragen] and interpretation in the 1980s. “Abt. Internationale Verbindungen des BuV (1949-89)” in “FDGB-Lexikon,” accessed November 12, 2016, http://library.fes.de/FDGB-Lexikon/rahmen/lexikon_frame.html.

⁶³ SAPMO-BArch DY 79/246, “Perspektivplan für das Ausländerstudium,” 3.

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document from 1962 reveals, “in view of the directives of the central committee of the SED, the foreign policy of our country, and the FDGB’s plan for international work.” That year, the most important countries were deemed to be Mali, Ghana, Guinea, Senegal, Nigeria, Tanganyika, Kenya, North and South Rhodesia, Ceylon and Burma.⁶⁴ Each delegation’s ideological weaknesses were diagnosed, and tasks were set accordingly: the Ghanaians and the Guineans, for example, as two of the earliest and most prominent postcolonial sub-Saharan African nations, were deemed to lack a strong enough critique of the threat of neocolonialism.⁶⁵ The Tanganyikan delegation were guilty of underestimating the success of their revolution and the demands of their leading role in East Africa, while the report voiced concerns regarding anticommunism in Kenya.⁶⁶

This postcolonial taxonomy was constructed to help organisations understand the “objective conditions” on the ground in the proto-socialist world. The presence of the students in Berlin would help the GDR authorities understand the tendencies of development there; armed with a better understanding of these tendencies, the school would arm the students in turn with the blueprints for action. In returning to the proto-socialist world, these students would confirm these tendencies by acting to move the proto-socialist world toward a “non-capitalist development path,” thus accelerating the transition from capitalism to socialism and eventually communism. In this early,

⁶⁴ SAPMO-BArch, DY 79/2500, “Programm der weiteren ideologisch-politischen Arbeit im 3. afro-asiatischen Lehrgang,” 22.10.1962, 2.

⁶⁵ The notion that Ghana became the first sub-Saharan nation to gain independence in 1957 is a widespread but problematic contention. Technically the independence of Liberia (1847), South Africa (1910), Ethiopia (1941), and Sudan/South Sudan (1956) all pre-dated that of Ghana, but these are often dismissed on the basis of the continuing power of non-native elites (Liberia and South Africa), lack of a lengthy period of colonial rule (Ethiopia) and geographical ambiguity and subsequent instability (Sudan). Ghanaian independence was elevated in symbolic importance by the status of its first leader, Kwame Nkrumah as, to quote Frederick Cooper, ‘More than a political leader; he was a prophet of independence, of anti-imperialism, of Pan-Africanism.’ Frederick Cooper, *Africa Since 1940: The Past of the Present* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 161.

⁶⁶ SAPMO-BArch, DY 79/2500 “Programm für die weitere ideologisch-politische Arbeit mit der 3. Lehrgang,” 7.

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optimistic phase these students were imagined as the “avant-garde” of a group that would go on to surround the capitalist world.⁶⁷

Provincializing Europe: The Third Cohort and the German Question

The students that attended the institute were not passive objects within the postcolonial taxonomy, however. Inhabiting a similar paradox to the one outlined by Alexei Yurchak in his study of Soviet citizens under “late socialism,” students were supposed to both submit to the party line *and* independently and creatively apply what they were learning to contemporary events.⁶⁸ A report distributed to teachers in 1962 summarises this point. The teachers should focus, the report stated, on four key areas. The first three involved ideological conformity: the teachers should better explain the need for peaceful coexistence, the position of the socialist world system, and the understanding of the historical role of the working class. The fourth goal was that teachers needed to focus on encouraging the students so that they “endeavour to work and think creatively and independently.”⁶⁹ The paradox of this demand was never clearer than in the third cohort of students who came to study at the institute, from September 1961 to April 1963. This section will take this cohort of students as a case study, utilising the copious reports housed in the archives on the “ideological-political” performance of students. The period gives us an understanding of a critical and insightful period in world communism, as postcolonial states continued to emerge and the Sino-Soviet split came out into the open.

⁶⁷ Angermann, “‘Ihr gehört auch zur Avantgarde’. Afrikanische Gewerkschafter an der FDGB-Hochschule Fritz Heckert (1961-1963),” 51.

⁶⁸ Alexei Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever, until It Was No More : The Last Soviet Generation* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006), 11.

⁶⁹ SAPMO-BArch, DY 79/2500, “Programm der weiteren ideologisch-politischen Arbeit im 3. afro-asiatischen Lehrgang,” 3.

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These reports were written in a highly standardised, ideological fashion, forming a similar narrative code to the “ground reports” that Mathieu Denis examined in his study of the FDGB.⁷⁰ A feature of this narrative code that is useful for our investigation here—one which makes an appearance in the *Hochschule* files—is the constantly repeating motif of progression and development. As Denis notes, most of the reports that he examined (FDGB regional committees were required to report “upwards” on local union affairs on a regular basis), open with what Denis calls “global”, general depiction of progress. Problems and setbacks were characterised as subjective and blamed on management errors or individual problems. This was based on class analysis: because the GDR had removed class tension by abolishing private property, any setbacks were not caused by objective conditions but by the “historical residues” of such class tension.⁷¹

The teachers’ reports itemised which areas of the curriculum students were responding well to and which they had problems with, listing any opinions the students held which diverged from the set ideological line. These reports followed the narrative code outlined by Denis, typically opening with a sentence regarding general progress which claimed that teaching was generally successful, followed by individual problems. The language in this regard was instructive. Incorrect opinions were labelled as *Unklarheiten*, meaning literally a “lack of clarity,” usually translated as “uncertainties” or “ambiguities,” and often blamed on poor teaching.⁷² The usage of this term bears a temporal implication, often being used in conjunction with the idea that students had “not yet” arrived at the correct conclusions.⁷³ The reports placed emphasis on individual problems in the face of collective progress, and setbacks were framed as subjective: soon-to-be-overcome snags rather than problems stemming from any objective or

⁷⁰ Denis, “Reading East German Bureaucrats.”

⁷¹ *ibid.*, 157.

⁷² See, for example SAPMO-BArch, DY 79/183 Letter from Deutschland to Voss, 27.3.1962.

⁷³ This temporal inflection has also been noted by Fulbrook, see Fulbrook, *The People’s State*, 32.

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structural issues. While the reports that Denis used as a source base deal specifically with the transitory nature of class relations in the workplace, the teaching staff at the institute saw the student's politics within the broader global frame of what they called “the epoch of transition from capitalism to socialism.”⁷⁴ As the student hailed from nations which were objectively anti-imperialist, FDGB elites and educators that exposing them to the correct anti-imperialist ideas would iron out any vestiges of colonialism-informed “uncertainties.”

The third cohort came to the institute during a particularly tumultuous time in this global transition. It was made up of 95 students from 20 different countries (18 African countries and two Asian). FDGB reports suggested that 90 percent came from peasant backgrounds, with five percent stemming from the intelligentsia and five percent workers. Over half had experience in trade unionism.⁷⁵ The students arrived shortly after the building of the Berlin Wall in August 1961. In October, Cold War tensions came to a head, with Soviet and US tanks involved in a stand-off at Checkpoint Charlie in Berlin.⁷⁶ In December Fidel Castro would announce that Cuba had joined the Marxist-Leninist camp.⁷⁷ Perhaps most notably, 1961–1962 saw an escalation in the Sino-Soviet split, the most noteworthy cause being the Cuban Missile Crisis of October 1962, as well as numerous smaller incidents which contributed to the divide, such as the Indian liberation of Goa in December 1961 and the Himalayan War between China and India during September and November of 1962.⁷⁸

⁷⁴ SAPMO-BArch, DY 79/408, “Diskussionsbeitrag zur Volkskammersitzung.”

⁷⁵ SAPMO-BArch, DY 79/2500, “Analyse der Arbeit im 3. afro-asiatischen Lehrgang.”

⁷⁶ On the Berlin crisis, see Gerhard Wettig, *Chruschtschows Berlin-Krise 1958 bis 1963: Drohpolitik und Mauerbau* (Munich: Oldenbourg Verlag, 2009), 185–200.

⁷⁷ “Today,” Castro claimed, “our revolution is not only de facto Marxist-Leninist, but in its ideological basis and therefore de jure a Marxist-Leninist revolution.” Cited in Robert K. Furtak, *Kuba und der Weltkommunismus* (Wiesbaden: Springer-Verlag, 2013), 57.

⁷⁸ John W. Garver, *Protracted Contest: Sino-Indian Rivalry in the Twentieth Century* (Washington: University of Washington Press, 2001), 58–72.

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Another key event was the hosting of the annual International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) conference in West Berlin in July 1962, as a protest against what ICFTU publications called the “wall of shame.”⁷⁹ The ICFTU was a collection of non-communist trade unions resulting from a split of the World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU) in 1949 following allegations of communist domination of the latter. The FDGB remained in the WFTU, which consisted mainly of unions within the Soviet sphere of influence. Following the announcement of the ICFTU conference in Berlin, the WFTU executive committee moved to host a “day of friendship” in East Berlin. Documents sent to the FDGB from the WFTU outlined the importance of the event and what was to be focused on: the day of friendship, one letter notes, “should outline the difference in the character of our reaction [to the ICFTU conference], which is a positive representation of our unity and our politics.”⁸⁰ The FDGB was to focus on recent events, such as the July 1962 referendum for independence in Algeria, and the World Congress for Peace and Disarmament in Moscow in the same year.⁸¹

To the consternation of the institute’s leadership a number of students attended the conference ICFTU conference on the day. Visits to West Berlin are a recurring theme within the archival documents; these trips seemed common, and FDGB functionaries were concerned to limit them. Defection was also a concern. As Julie Hessler has shown, African students who defected from the Soviet Union in this period received extensive press coverage in the West.⁸² Perhaps surprisingly, students appeared able to freely move between West and East in spite of the building of the wall. Internal FDGB reports at the end of 1961 reported that four Congolese students had been “enticed” (*abgeworben*) to move to the FRG by a West German-based Catholic aid organisation

⁷⁹ Mathilde Von Bulow, *West Germany, Cold War Europe and the Algerian War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 380.

⁸⁰ SAPMO-BArch, DY 79/2500 “Einige Fragen zur Bedeutung des “Tages der Freundschaft.”

⁸¹ *ibid.*

⁸² Hessler, “Death of an African Student in Moscow,” 21.

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which had offered them a stipend of 900 *Westmark* a month.⁸³ Despite attempts made by staff at the institute to persuade students not to travel to the western part of the city on the basis that it was a “spy centre” [Agentzentrale] and a military base for NATO, they continued to do so.⁸⁴

In general, students seemed unconcerned about the complexities of intra-German conflict. The minutes of a meeting held between teachers and students in response to the attendance of the ICFTU conference was revealing in this regard. Some students were drawn to West Berlin by the lure of consumer goods and the chance to spend hard currency. A student from Somalia wanted to get gold teeth fitted as it was widely known, he said, “that there is no gold in the GDR.”⁸⁵ While some students condemned shopping in West Berlin as breaking the boycott of South Africa and thus supporting Apartheid, the minutes of the meeting suggest that few seemed taken with institute leader Heinz Deutschland’s point that spending hard currency in the West “damaged the GDR’s sovereignty” by depriving it of vital funds.⁸⁶ Another Cameroonian student, for example, had no qualms with the spending of hard currency in West Berlin, where he himself had bought a suit and a watch; “There are many in Berlin,” he noted, “who think you can condemn someone for their suit,” noting with regret that he had faced the same fate. For this student though, revolutionary spirit could not be “corrupted” merely by visiting West Berlin.⁸⁷

Similar sentiment was voiced by other students who had visited West Berlin. Many seemed confused about the supposed threats of visiting the Western part of the city: for

⁸³ Interestingly, the report went on the claim that the students had felt deceived upon arriving and had communicated, via a third party, their willingness to return to the GDR. SAPMO-BArch, DY 34/16498, “Agententätigkeit zur Abwerbung von Gewerkschaftsstudenten an der Hochschule in Bernau,” 1.

⁸⁴ SAPMO-BArch, DY 79/246 “Protokoll des Treffens der Delegationsleiter des Rates mit Deubner, Powik und Deutschland,” 1.

⁸⁵ *ibid.*, 3

⁸⁶ *ibid.*, 4.

⁸⁷ *ibid.*, 2.

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another Cameroonian student, for example, “a trip to West Berlin for a class conscious worker and trade unionist represents no danger.”⁸⁸ The minutes of the meeting represent a wider trend: that the FDGB found it very difficult to convince students from the proto-socialist world to adopt firm anti-West German stances. Students complained that too much time was spent on the “West Berlin question.”⁸⁹ One report suggests that 30 to 40 percent of the students were regularly visiting West Berlin in May and June of 1962.⁹⁰ The excuses given for visiting West Berlin tended not to be directly contradictory to the ideological message being delivered to the students, but rather suggested that the students were unable or unwilling to fit the intra-German conflict into a wider schema of anti-imperialism. As we have seen, the FDGB pushed the line that the FRG was a constant and real threat to the independence movements, citing, for example, their supposed involvement in the death of Patrice Lumumba. The students, however, seemed unconvinced by the specificity of the West German threat. As one remarked in a seminar on West Berlin, it was educational for a revolutionary to see West Berlin. Why was it more dangerous than any other capitalist city?⁹¹ This was a frequent concern for the FDGB authorities, who appeared highly sensitive to the issue in their reports. Concerns were raised, for example, when students used the term *Mauer* to refer to the inner-German border.⁹²

Such cases were indicative of a wider problem in the attempt to guide students along the subtle and often apparently contradictory tenets of GDR foreign policy. Students were often clearly confused or uninterested with regard to where the policies of the GDR

⁸⁸ *ibid.*, 4.

⁸⁹ SAPMO-BArch, DY 79/405, Letter from Donitz to the faculty for foreign study, 17.6.64.

⁹⁰ SAPMO-BArch, DY 79/2500, “Analyse der Arbeit im 3. afro-asiatischen Lehrgang,” 7.

⁹¹ SAPMO-BArch, DY 79/2500, “Bericht über die Ergebnisse der Westberlindiskussion.”

⁹² *Mauer* was the term widely used in the West to refer to the Berlin Wall, which was officially known as the Antifaschistischer Schutzwall or “Anti Fascist Protection Rampart.” SAPMO-BArch, DY 79/488, “Zu aktuellen Fragen zur Lehre in beiden Lehrgängen,” 6.

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sat within a wider, global anti-imperialist politics. This confusion was summarised at a question and answer session in 1963 with Politburo member Erich Mückenberger. One student noted that he had repeatedly been told that the GDR overtaking the FRG in productivity rates had not only a national but an international significance but that he didn't know what this international significance was.⁹³ Other students criticised Mückenberger when he sought to compare the German question to the Cuban Missile Crisis, stating that the USA wanted to isolate Cuba in a way incomparable to the relations between the FRG and the GDR.⁹⁴ The existential anxiety seen in the previous chapter regarding the GDR's sovereign status was evident in the teaching, a key element of which was proving that the GDR was a sovereign state. On more than one occasion, teachers expressed concern that this notion was questioned by students.⁹⁵ The irrelevance of the German question for the students was perhaps unsurprising in light of that fact that, according to one analysis of the third cohort, many of the students were unaware of the existence of two Germanies before their arrival.⁹⁶

This irrelevance can be explained in part by the overlapping of two political strategies during this period: GDR elites had not yet completely abandoned ideas of pan-German socialist statehood, but were in the process of "turning" toward the proto-socialist world. As we will see in the following chapters, the distinguishing of "good" and "bad" Germans remained an important feature of the GDR's engagement with the proto-socialist world. But the explicit focus on small details such as the legal status of Berlin would wane as the German question did throughout the 1960s. Here the students performed a curious function: in both their confusion and lack of interest in these questions, they acted out

⁹³ SAPMO-BArch, DY 79/408, "Fragen aus dem Forum mit Genosse Mückenberger," 2.

⁹⁴ *ibid.*, 3

⁹⁵ SAPMO-BArch, DY 79/488, "Zu aktuellen Fragen zur Lehre in beiden Lehrgängen," 6.

⁹⁶ SAPMO-BArch, DY 79/2500, "Analyse der Arbeit im 3. afro-asiatischen Lehrgang," 1.

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a sort of *provincializing* of the German question.⁹⁷ In doing so they revealed a paradoxical parochialism of GDR elite's global vision; born of fear of isolation within Europe and a simplistic account of the realities of the extra-European world, it was prone to subordinating the apparently "objective" demands of global anti-imperialism to the domestic needs of the GDR itself.

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Similar clashes could be detected between what the students deemed to best fit the interests of anti-imperialism and the foreign policy interests of the GDR with regard to the United Nations (UN). The communist world's insistence on using the channels of the UN rather than intervening directly during the Congo crisis was widely condemned by African students. As the secretary of the African Students Union in the GDR noted in early 1963, the imperialist powers still maintained supremacy in the UN, meaning that the Soviet Union's attempt to save Lumumba following his arrest ended in failure. This meant, as he put it, that "Through the socialist state's application of peaceful coexistence, the progressive development of the Congo was beaten back, Lumumba was murdered and the liberation movements of Africa were delivered a huge blow. This could not have happened had the USSR and other socialist states acted."⁹⁸ The doctrine of peaceful coexistence became the polestar of what teaching staff at the *Hochschule* euphemistically called "ideological difficulties" during this period, and it was here where a divergence between students and teaching staff was at its clearest. As we have seen, the doctrine was sold to the citizens of the proto-socialist world on the basis that

⁹⁷ Quinn Slobodian, "Introduction," in *Comrades of Color: East Germany in the Cold War World*, ed. Quinn Slobodian (New York: Berghahn Books, 2015), 3.

⁹⁸ SAPMO-Barch, DY 79/2500, Letter from Lamprecht to Kopetz, Bethel, Deutschland, 30.01.1963, 4.

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disarmament would free up funds for development, in turn freeing newly independent states from the shackles and dangers of Western development aid and its corollary, neocolonialism. Despite GDR's leaders reticence regarding the concept, distilling a belief in peaceful coexistence was a key part of the institute curriculum.

Early signs that distilling this belief would be difficult were encountered during the Congo crisis. Beginning in 1960 and continuing through the first half of the decade, the key moment of the crisis was the murder at the end of 1960 of Congolese leader and pan-African anti-colonial icon Patrice Lumumba.⁹⁹ While previous attempts to teach peaceful coexistence had met with apathy, but not resistance—a seminar report from January 1961 noted few difficulties, nor great enthusiasm, but did note that some students' claims to have not attended due to illness were demonstrably untrue.¹⁰⁰ However, news of Lumumba's death reached the public in February and began to spark conflict. A report evaluating the cohort at the end of their studies suggested that students had begun to question why Cuba received military support and the Congo had not around this time, with one student noting that the Congo had been “left in the lurch” by the socialist camp.¹⁰¹ In December 1961 India successfully invaded Portuguese Goa, leading another student to argue that peaceful coexistence would have led to the Goan people into placating the Portuguese, and similar points were made about the ongoing Algerian War.¹⁰²

⁹⁹ On the socialist world's role in the Congo crisis, see Masow Sergej, “Die Sowjetunion und die Kongokrise 1960 bis 1964.,” in *Krisen im Kalten Krieg*, ed. Bernd Greiner, Christian Th. Müller, and Dierk Walter (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 2012), 274–97.

¹⁰⁰ SAPMO-BArch DY 79/184, “Bericht vom 12.1.1961.”

¹⁰¹ SAPMO-BArch, DY 79/2500, Letter from Lamprecht to Kopetz, Bethel, Deutschland, 4.

¹⁰² *ibid.*, p.5. In fact, the Soviets had supported the invasion of Goa: future premier Leonid Brezhnev, then President of the Soviet Union, was in India at the time and made several speeches praising the invasion, while the Soviets blocked a hostile US-led UN motion in favour of Portuguese claims to the enclave. Geoffrey Jukes, *The Soviet Union in Asia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973).

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Things came to a head, however, in October 1962. The Cuban Missile Crisis was the focal point, but the Second Sino-Indian Border War also proved important. As Lorenz Lüthi has shown, these parallel crises provided fuel to the fire that would eventually lead to the sealing of the Sino-Soviet rift in 1963. Particularly problematic was the impression on the part of Mao that Khrushchev had acted with weakness with regard to American imperialism in Cuba as well as Soviet support of India, which included planned deliveries of MiG-21's. While Mao had persuaded Khrushchev to cancel these in the early days of the war, the Soviet leader later reversed this decision following a Maoist propaganda campaign denouncing the Soviet withdrawal of missiles from Cuba.¹⁰³

Evidence from the end of term reports suggest that the majority of the students shared Mao's viewpoint. This situation was deemed severe enough a crisis that the director of the school, Karl Kampfert, felt compelled to report it to the head of the FDGB. Kampfert noted that while the experience of the cohort was generally successful, "since the events in the Caribbean (October 1962) we have been compelled to differentiate ourselves with a large number of opinions...which essentially stem from the fact that our students don't understand the politics of peaceful coexistence."¹⁰⁴ The report listed a litany of criticisms aimed at Khrushchev and the Soviets; immediately after the announcement of the withdrawal of Soviet rockets, Kampfert claimed, many African students produced "hefty" criticisms of Soviet policy. The Soviet Union had not saved the peace, and no danger of war had existed. Instead, the students saw that the Soviets had "retreated in the face of the imperialists."¹⁰⁵ The Soviet Union, they argued, was weaker now than it was in 1956 at the time of the Suez crisis, and Khrushchev has been deceived by Kennedy. Perhaps most damagingly, they argued that

¹⁰³ Lüthi, *The Sino-Soviet Split*, 224-27.

¹⁰⁴ SAPMO-BArch, DY 79/405, Letter from Kampfert to Warnke, 3.1.63, 1.

¹⁰⁵ *ibid.*

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the Soviet Union “had betrayed Cuba and delivered a terrible blow to all national liberation movements.” In addition to this, the report noted that all of the students had supported the Chinese position in the Sino-Indian war.¹⁰⁶

By November the institute was circulating a document outlining the key arguments the teachers at the institution were facing, and how to respond to them. It listed the key arguments as the following: “1. The US didn’t want to start a war and wouldn’t take the risk. 2. The Soviet Union’s proposal was a compromise, in which the Soviet Union was defeated. 3. The Soviet Union is weaker now than in 1956 at the time of the Suez Crisis. 4. The Soviet Union had betrayed Cuba. 5. The promises of Kennedy are worthless, as one should never trust an imperialist.”¹⁰⁷ In response, teachers were told to frame the issue as one of sovereignty. “The Soviet Union has done, and continues to do much for the securing of Cuba’s sovereignty,” the argumentation document read; “For the sovereignty of Cuba, the preservation of peace was the most important step: war would have meant that today a sovereign and independent Cuba would not exist.”¹⁰⁸ The crisis was leading to more fundamental critiques of peaceful coexistence, too. Students had begun to question its very tenets: one asked why if it is possible for two different societal orders to coexist is it not possible for the bourgeoisie and the proletariat to do the same. Others condemned the GDR for labelling China a warmonger.¹⁰⁹

It was becoming clear to the authorities that a large number of students were becoming radicalised through their stays in the GDR. While some, such as those from Burma and Ceylon, were deemed by the FDGB to have arrived already influenced by Maoism, for most, it was their stay in the GDR that exposed them to Maoist literature.¹¹⁰ The FDGB files are rife with fears regarding the infiltration of such literature, as well as

¹⁰⁶ *ibid.*, 2.

¹⁰⁷ SAPMO-BArch, DY 79/408, “Argumentation zur Kuba-Diskussion,” 1-3.

¹⁰⁸ *ibid.*, 3

¹⁰⁹ SAPMO-BArch, DY 79/184, “Beratung mit der 3. Klasse am 21. September, 1960.”

¹¹⁰ SAPMO-BArch, DY 79/405, ‘Letter from Kampfert to Warnke’, 3.1.63, 3.

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the broadcasts of Radio Peking. In his letter to Warnke, Kampfert noted that “A great hinderance for us in the course is the existence of Chinese material, above all the “Peking Review,” which many students subscribe to and is delivered through the postal system. There is a high probability that there is other Chinese material from the Chinese embassy or the Chinese Union Federation that is being directly sent to the students. With their studies, the students receive various papers and journals from other students from their home countries as well as regular Western news mailing, that despite our well organised news service, we have been unable to prevent.”¹¹¹

It was notable that despite great efforts to stem the flow of Maoist influence, the institute leadership concluded at the end of the course that they had been “unable to convince the majority of the students of the correctness of the position of the Soviet Union, nor the correctness and necessity of the politics of peaceful coexistence.”¹¹² Such acceptance of failure was a rare and revealing rupture in the narrative code of the FDGB reports. Unlike other ideological issues, no subjective failures on the part of teaching staff or management were found. Unlike the other failures experienced by the FDGB, the teaching of peaceful coexistence and the appeal of Maoism were thus presented as objective concerns: ruptures in the fabric of the postcolonial taxonomy that the communists had produced in response to decolonisation. In the final analysis, all that could be said of the cohort was that they possessed the “basis of an anti-imperialist politics.”¹¹³ At a meeting to evaluate the cohort at the end of the academic year, the teaching staff discussed how to counter the issue, which was referred to euphemistically as “dogmatism.” Where did correct ideas come from? Opinion was divided. Some suggested that students “lacked...the concrete knowledge needed to overcome” such

¹¹¹ SAPMO-BArch, DY 79/405, Letter from Kampfert to Warnke, 3.1.63, 3.

¹¹² *ibid.*, 2.

¹¹³ SAPMO-BArch, DY 79/2500, “Auswertung des 3. Lehrgangs,” 1.

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dogmatism.¹¹⁴ Others suggested that their role was simply to imbue the students with the basics of Marxism-Leninism and let them work out their own viewpoints, although this was immediately rejected by others, who made it clear that the students “should represent the opinion of our party and our organisation.”¹¹⁵ In the end, according to deputy leader Wilhelm Wilke, it was to be acknowledged that “there are some problems that cannot be solved. All we can do is attempt to bring students closer to the truth.”¹¹⁶

Conclusion

The difficulties the FDGB experienced in Bernau during the early 1960s are part of a more universal story about the unpredictability of centre/periphery educational exchange. Throughout much of twentieth-century history attempts to form loyal cadres through international education have produced students with hostile ideas to the metropole, with the largely Western-educated leaders of post-war national liberation movements exemplars of this trend.¹¹⁷ The real ideological battle at the institute during this period was not, however, between capitalism and communism, but between Soviet and Maoist informed visions of global communism. If the eventual Soviet victory over the Maoist challenge was a pyrrhic one, the experiences of the third cohort were, for GDR elites, something of a paradoxical success. The school was to contribute to a postcolonial taxonomy by which East Germans could better understand the transformations in the proto-socialist world. It succeeded in doing so, but instead of revealing the world GDR functionaries had hoped to find, the students revealed the

¹¹⁴ SAPMO-BArch, DY 79/2500, “Protokoll über die Diskussion zur Auswertung des 3. Lehrgangs,” 1.

¹¹⁵ *ibid.*, 4-5.

¹¹⁶ *ibid.*, 5.

¹¹⁷ On this, see Michael Goebel, *Anti-Imperial Metropolis: Interwar Paris and the Seeds of Third World Nationalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

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comparative advantage with which Maoism was operating at the time. Similarly, the school was successful in its aim of producing “creative and independent” revolutionaries in the third cohort. There is little evidence to suggest that the students left as capitalists, although some surely did. Instead, the institute appeared to produce a cohort of committed trade unionists who accepted many Soviet tenets but placed anti-imperialism ahead of anti-capitalism in their thinking.

Globalisation, as Anthony Giddens has noted, “fragments as it coordinates.”¹¹⁸ The spark of decolonisation led an embattled GDR elite to turn to the proto-socialist world in the early 1960s, seeking to better understand and shape happenings there. They focused, in the beginning, on Africa. But as they sought to co-ordinate their own interests with those of trade union leaders in those emerging states, they quickly became alert to the complexities of the proto-socialist world. Concerns regarding Maoism at the school were fed up the chain of command as high as the Politburo.¹¹⁹ Beyond Maoist positions, incoming students seemed unconcerned about the complexities of the German conflict and the doctrinal foreign policy of the socialist world. These trade unionists often belonged to the vanguard of national liberation in Africa in the early 1960s and their strong political will and refusal to dogmatically adopt Soviet foreign policy tenets was typical of the early generation of postcolonial leaders, who often defied Cold War binaries. The socialist world would have to wait until the 1970s for Africa to begin to producing political movements openly committed to Marxism-Leninism.

Were the early years of the institute a failure? On one level, the copious correspondence between former students and the school housed in the federal archives proves that the school was successful in creating transnational bonds during this period. Students were encouraged to keep staff at the institute up-to-date with political developments in their home countries as they returned, and throughout the 1960s these

¹¹⁸ Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), 175.

¹¹⁹ Warnke had been a member of the Politburo since 1958.

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updates frequently proved to be negative. One letter from the middle part of the decade suggested that Africa was a “site of increasing imperialist activity.”¹²⁰ Others contained evidence that the students’ new-found mobility had been curtailed when they returned home: a Kenyan unionist had been banned from visiting socialist countries, and a Congolese former student was sentenced to life imprisonment upon his arrival, although was later released.¹²¹ Already, even at this early stage of the GDR’s orientation toward the socialist world we see signs of its archipelagic nature; the notion of socialist world system was an expansive one, tied to the supposedly growing strength of a growing, increasingly converging socialist world. But this convergence equally produced fragmentation: by traversing the system, trade unionists were exposed to imperialist “gaps” within it, whether that was FRG-based organizations attempting to lure them away from West Berlin, or internment by hostile states on the way home. Through the students, GDR elites had received an early indication that the objective anti-imperialism of the proto-socialist world would not translate readily into the expansion of the socialist world system. As much as this new co-ordination produced bonds, the student’s presence in Europe also accelerated fragmentation *within* the socialist world, too. Scholarly work on the worldwide proliferation of Maoism has focused naturally on the publication of *Quotations from Chairman Mao*, or the “Little Red Book,” published in 1964 and numbering well over a billion copies.¹²² The radicalisation of the third cohort at the institute and the ease with which they were able to consume Maoist literature suggests that this proliferation was well underway in the first part of the decade. In more ways than one, then, the early years at the institute was a precursor of things to come.

¹²⁰ SAPMO-BArch, DY 79/619, Letter from Sekou Omar Keita, 16.11.1966.

¹²¹ SAPMO-BArch DY 79/619, Letter from J Boy, no date, Letter from Toure, 5.3.1968.

¹²² See for example Alexander C. Cook, ed., *Mao’s Little Red Book: A Global History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

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With the regular monthly acquisition of solidarity marks members express their consciousness...Thanks to the consistent solidarity of its members, the FDGB has acquired a high level of regard in the international workers and trade union movement.

Die Gewerkschaftskasse, handbook for trade union activists, 1974¹

Of course, to argue that "the state" is deeply rooted in people's lives and identities, their language and dreams, their coping mechanisms and even their resistance—a point demonstrated with equal force in the unraveling as well as the building of socialism—is not to mistake the main wellsprings of state actions or to diminish the importance of state machine.

Stephen Kotkin, *The State - is it us?*²

Introduction

A key contention of this thesis is that the GDR's orientation to the proto-socialist world had a profound effect on everyday life in the state. The most important manifestation of this was the culture of solidarity that found its way into almost all

¹ Harri Weber, *Die Gewerkschaftskasse: Handbuch Für Die Finanzpolitische Arbeit Der Betriebs- Und Ortsgewerkschaftsleitungen* (Berlin: Verlag Tribüne, 1974), 24–26.

² Kotkin, "The State—Is It Us?," 45.

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spheres of activity; the workplace, the great locus point of human activity for Marxist-Leninists, being no exception. It was there that one of the most important manifestations of solidarity culture took place: the solidarity donation. Over the GDR's 40-year existence, *Solidaritätsspenden* were a ubiquitous feature of everyday life: the vast majority of GDR citizens made regular payments which funded aid and development projects almost exclusively in the proto-socialist world. Although similar workplace donations existed in other parts of socialist Europe, the scale of the solidarity system in the GDR was distinctive.³ From the 1970s onwards, over 90 percent of GDR workers donated regularly to the fund. Little is known about the realities of this practice, however.

Examining the solidarity donation as a practice between state and society, this chapter will challenge the notion the solidarity culture in the GDR was primarily driven by a desire to obtain legitimacy. For a start, it provides compelling evidence for the legitimacy paradox; donation levels showing that the high point of GDR solidarity activity came at the end of the 1970s, when the GDR's international legitimacy crisis had been largely resolved. It also complicates the notion that solidarity was a project conceived of as a means to obtain domestic legitimacy. This form of solidarity frequently created conflict between state and society. Rather than a sort of public-relations stunt to prove the legitimacy of the GDR, international solidarity was a globally-minded political project, as much about instilling a sense of international consciousness in the GDR population at large as about presenting an image of the GDR as a "legitimate" state. Great attention was devoted to the raising of socialist internationalist consciousness [Bewusstsein] by the organisers of the solidarity donation. The emphasis placed on ensuring that solidarity was practiced in the state-defined, "correct" form indicates the importance placed on this consciousness-raising, the state often being dogmatic in this regard. Using collective letters written to a regional newspaper, the *Sächsische Zeitung* (SZ), this chapter will

³ On Hungary, see Mark and Apor, "Socialism Goes Global," 875.

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show how strictly the state sought to police discourse surrounding the donations, and how citizens contested and reshaped this discourse.

What did the ordinary East German citizen make of the ubiquitous demand to donate to the proto-socialist world? Compelled by the *Bitterfelder Weg* initiative to take up work in a factory, author Brigitte Reimann moved to the town of Hoyerswerda in 1960 to work at the Gaskombinate Schwarze Pumpe, a coal refinery situated within a dense industrial network at the eastern edge of the GDR.⁴ Later, in 1962, Reimann wrote of her initial experiences of factory life in surprisingly frank terms in the official party newspaper, *Neues Deutschland*:

I came to the workers—a class of heroes—as an eager student. I found the heroism that I had expected: in their work; in their eight or nine hours on the factory floor. Gradually, however, I started to notice that many didn't look beyond their pay packet; that there was conflict over bonuses; that solidarity marks were affixed without thought (as if the real connection to international solidarity had disappeared); that those who I believed sacrificed their evenings willingly in fact did so for material benefits; that at meetings what was said was different to what was said privately.⁵

Reimann's concerns would be echoed in the decades that followed by GDR functionaries and historians alike. Indeed, her depiction of the GDR worker has arguably become the archetype. GDR workers have often been presented as more interested in material benefits than socialist politics; engaging in state political practices mechanically without enthusiasm; and honest only within the private sphere. The prominence of the notion of the GDR as a society of “niches,” popularised by Günter

⁴ On the initiative, see Manuela Bonnke, *Kunst in Produktion: Bildende Kunst und volkseigene Wirtschaft in der SBZ/DDR* (Köln: Böhlau Verlag, 2007), 189.

⁵ “Entdeckung einer schlichten Wahrheit,” *Neues Deutschland*, 8. December 1962, p.7

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Gaus, Bonn's first Permanent Representative in the GDR, is illustrative of the eminence of this archetype.⁶

From its establishment in the 1980s Gaus' theory went on to percolate into the wider historiography, for it seemed to provide an answer to what became the classic conundrum of the GDR for most outside observers: how to explain the apparently peaceful coexistence of state and citizen. As Jonathan Grix would put it, "Communist rule in east Germany eventually turned public opinion into private opinion...The niche society has the function of a safety valve," where the majority of GDR citizens could "escape and retreat from the tedious party propaganda and over politicised daily life of communist society."⁷ By and large this image stuck, until Paul Betts' ground-breaking study of private life in the GDR qualified it by showing that such "niches" did not represent an apolitical space of retreat, but rather the site of a conflicted, at times fraught, but nevertheless *functional* social contract between state and citizen.⁸ Despite this qualification, Betts' study fits with the broader literature characterising the Honecker era as one of increasing individualisation, atomisation and routinisation of public political practices. In relation to the FDGB, Betts' work chimes with Renate Hürtgen's analysis of trade union *Vertrauensleute*, or shop stewards, which found a complete breakdown of collective resistance and the emergence of an individualised culture of interest representation in the 1970s and 1980s.⁹ Similarly, Mary Fulbrook has shown that while the FDGB's structures did allow for limited forms of interest representation on issues such as health and safety in the workplace, they deliberately created an

⁶ Günter Gaus, *Wo Deutschland liegt: eine Ortsbestimmung* (Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1986).

⁷ Jonathan Grix, "Recasting Civil Society in East Germany," in *The New Germany in the East: Policy Agendas and Social Developments Since Unification*, ed. Christopher Flockton, Eva Kolinsky, and Rosalind M. O. Pritchard (London: Taylor & Francis, 2000), 270.

⁸ Betts, *Within Walls*.

⁹ Hürtgen, *Zwischen Disziplinierung und Partizipation*.

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individualised culture of complaint as opposed to a collective platform for action.¹⁰ More broadly the GDR has been theorized as a space where, to quote Heather Gumbert, “without a political public sphere, challenges to the state had to be found in sites of consumption, privileging individual experience and the performance of individualised identity.”¹¹ The consensus is that these structures were successful in creating at least the appearance of societal acquiescence in the Honecker era, one described by Günter de Bruyn as being defined by a “keep quiet agreement” between the top and grassroots.¹² GDR citizens thus became “masters of double-speak,” as Patrick Major has put it.¹³

In any historical context workplace donations create a sense of collective pressure. But given the established historical narrative of acquiescence and “double-speak” in the Honecker era, it is unsurprising that historians have claimed that “the degree of pressure and feeling of compulsion was much greater in East Germany,” to quote Gregory Witkowski, for example.¹⁴ For Lothar Kalb, the donation was a “ritual” behind which loomed the threat of collective discipline.”¹⁵ Detlev Brunner describes the donations as “obligatory” for the overwhelming majority, and the process “strongly formalised.”¹⁶ Achim Reichhardt, former general secretary of the Solidarity Committee, claimed in his memoirs that after the *Wende* “it was always assumed” by outside observers that the GDR was only able to carry out its solidarity campaigns because the

¹⁰ Fulbrook, *The People's State*, 224, 268.

¹¹ Heather L. Gumbert, *Envisioning Socialism: Television and the Cold War in the German Democratic Republic* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2014), 5.

¹² Quoted in Jeannette Z. Madarász, *Conflict and Compromise in East Germany, 1971-1989: A Precarious Stability* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 22.

¹³ Patrick Major, *Behind the Berlin Wall: East Germany and the Frontiers of Power* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 157.

¹⁴ Witkowski, “Between Fighters and Beggars: Socialist Philanthropy and the Imagery of Solidarity in East Germany,” 75–76.

¹⁵ Lothar Kalb, *Sendboten Olympias: die Geschichte des Ausländerstudiums an der DHfK Leipzig* (Leipzig: Leipziger Universitätsverlag, 2008), 48.

¹⁶ Detlev Brunner, “DDR „transnational.“ Die „internationale Solidarität“ der DDR,” in *Deutsche Zeitgeschichte - transnational*, ed. Alexander Gallus, Axel Schildt, and Detlef Siegfried (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2015), 70.

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population was forced to donate.¹⁷ Similarly, former GDR Africanist Ulrich van der Heyden has noted that despite evidence of genuine enthusiasm in some cases, in reality the “private” attitudes toward solidarity were “ordered, suggested, and allocated from the ‘top down.’”¹⁸ Former solidarity worker Ilona Schleicher’s assessment that today it is “a common judgment that a massive amount of force supported the solidarity of union members” would appear justified.¹⁹

Some scholars have allowed space for popular enthusiasm within their accounts. While for Schleicher, who worked within the solidarity apparatus in the GDR, it is possible to speak of a “moral pressure,” as well as “overzealous agitation” from the state, donations also stemmed from genuine feelings of solidarity aroused by news and images of liberation struggles.²⁰ Both Toni Weis and Gregory Witkowski have likewise noted that alongside workplace pressure, solidarity donations could also be the product of genuine enthusiasm.²¹ The coexistence of popular support and scepticism can also be seen in Gerd Horten’s account of solidarity events for Vietnam. According to Horten, the GDR public “were eternally sceptical of all official initiatives” but nevertheless displayed widespread popular support for state solidarity measures in Vietnam. Crucially, however, Horten (unlike Schleicher) sees this support as stemming not as a reaction to state pressure, but from an “anti-war” sentiment which grew organically in the late 1960s in the GDR “just as it did in the rest of the world.”²²

¹⁷ Achim Reichardt, *Nie vergessen: Solidarität üben!* (Berlin: Homilius, 2006), 19.

¹⁸ Heyden, *GDR Development Policy in Africa*, 57.

¹⁹ Ilona Schleicher, “FDGB-Offensive in Westafrika: Der Gewerkschaftsbund im Jahr Afrikas,” in *Engagiert für Afrika: die DDR und Afrika II*, ed. Ulrich van der Heyden (LIT Verlag, 1994), 88.

²⁰ Schleicher, 88.

²¹ Witkowski, “Between Fighters and Beggars: Socialist Philanthropy and the Imagery of Solidarity in East Germany,” 76; Weis, “The Politics Machine: On the Concept of ‘Solidarity’ in East German Support for SWAPO,” 359–60.

²² Horten, “Sailing in the Shadow of the Vietnam War,” 559.

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The logic of Horten's assertion—that the fundamental “gap” between state and society found a random alignment for a brief period during the early 1970s—is worth investigating here. Is it possible to draw such a clean distinction between public opinion, individual viewpoints, and the agenda of the regime in the GDR? As Josie McLellan has argued, the public and the private in the GDR were not always discrete, nor “should we assume that regime and popular agendas were always mutually exclusive.”²³ The continued focus on solidarity as a means to produce domestic legitimacy has meant that the sense remains that the GDR's “exchanges” with the proto-socialist world were more an imaginative myth imposed on the population by the state, rather than an active political project being continually contested and reshaped by this interaction. Importantly, the attempt to engage citizens on this front was often fraught with conflict. The state's attempt to turn its citizens into conscious practitioners of international solidarity with the proto-socialist world represents a prism through which we can view the collision of the public and private, between popular and regime agenda, identifying overlaps and conflicts.

Is it true that solidarity functioned in GDR society as a “working misunderstanding,” in Toni Weis' words, with solidarity existing as a sort of untethered, “abstract” ideal, unencumbered by a real world connection or contestation over its meaning?²⁴ Quinn Slobodian correctly points out that “for the great majority of the East German population, icons and contributions rather than personal experience remained the means of engaging with the proto-socialist world and activists of colour.”²⁵ Arguably, however, this is true for most cases of transnational identification and solidarity; furthermore, little has been done to acknowledge the ways in which GDR citizens

²³ Josie McLellan, *Love in the Time of Communism: Intimacy and Sexuality in the GDR* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 14.

²⁴ Weis, “The Politics Machine: On the Concept of ‘Solidarity’ in East German Support for SWAPO,” 361.

²⁵ Slobodian, “Socialist Chromatism: Race, Racism and the Racial Rainbow in East Germany,” 32.

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responded to this iconography. There now exists an exhaustive literature which emphasises GDR citizens' agency when it comes to citizen–state interactions, but this literature has left solidarity culture largely untouched.²⁶

This chapter will show that for GDR citizens the proto-socialist world was central to everyday experience. It shows that they were active players within the solidarity movement; donations could be ritualised and perfunctory, but some citizens also engaged enthusiastically of their own accord; some questioned the value and merit of the state's solidarity program; others still sought to upend and ridicule it. This chapter will begin by sketching the institutional basis for solidarity in the GDR. The following sections will deal with the FDGB's twin roles as both donation collector and consciousness raiser within the workplace, and a concluding section will use letters collected by the Stasi to assess the discursive boundaries of solidarity culture in the GDR.

Solidarity Donations in the GDR: from intra-German Aid to the Proto-Socialist World

As Detlev Brunner has shown, the GDR's commitment to international solidarity was a constituent part of its ideological foundation. That citizens of the GDR would “campaign for the international solidarity of the working class and all working people” was the first of Walter Ulbricht's famous “Ten Commandments of Socialist Morals and Ethics”; GDR youth who took the *Jugendweihe*, a secular coming-of-age-ceremony, were implored to “struggle in the spirit of proletarian internationalism”; both the FDGB and ruling SED had commitments to Leninist internationalism in their founding

²⁶ Some of the most important texts in this tradition include: Mary Fulbrook, ed., *Power and Society in the GDR, 1961-1979: The “Normalisation of Rule”?* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2013); Fulbrook, *The People's State*; Thomas Lindenberger, “Die Grenzen der Diktatur. Zur Einleitung,” in *Herrschaft und Eigen-Sinn in der Diktatur*, ed. Thomas Lindenberger (Cologne: Böhlau Köln, 1999).

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documents; and internationalism had a constitutional basis in article six of the GDR constitution which stated that the GDR supported “all states and peoples who struggle for national freedom and independence against imperialism and its colonial regime.”²⁷

This commitment to solidarity was deeply ingrained in pre-war German communist culture. In his memoirs, Erich Honecker spoke of collecting solidarity donations for striking workers and the Soviet Union as a member of the youth wing of the KPD.²⁸ This recollection spoke to the two different forms of donation inherited by the FDGB inherited as cultural practices after the establishment of the GDR, one domestic and one international. Although the right to strike was written into the GDR’s original constitution, this could only be invoked by the FDGB, who, unsurprisingly, never did so. The updated constitution of 1968 removed the right entirely. Domestic solidarity was thus practiced almost exclusively through the “People’s Solidarity” [Volkssolidarität] mass organisation which was founded as an initiative to help with post-war hunger in 1945, but which quickly found its remit limited to care of the elderly.²⁹

The state’s contention that social problems had found their resolution in the establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat meant that solidarity was thus almost always directed outward. In keeping with the GDR’s early focus on German unification, in the years before the division of Germany into two states had taken on the appearance of permanence this largely meant that solidarity donations were used to support workers in the FRG. In the 1950s so called *Solimarken*, or solidarity coupons, purchased to provide support for West Germans, were administered by the Greater Berlin Welfare Organisation [Sozialhilfe Groß-Berlin]. The organisation was an attempt to build a cross-party, cross-Berlin body which was theoretically independent, unlike the People’s

²⁷ Brunner, “DDR „transnational.“ Die „internationale Solidarität“ der DDR,” 64.

²⁸ Erich Honecker, *From My Life* (Oxford: Pergamon, 1981), 14.

²⁹ The organisation survived the Wende, and exists today as a charity. See Susanne Angerhausen, *Radikaler Organisationswandel: Wie die „Volkssolidarität“ die deutsche Vereinigung überlebte* (Berlin: Springer-Verlag, 2013).

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Solidarity organisation in the East or the SPD-led *Arbeiterwohlfahrt* in the West. Matthias Willing has shown that the *sozialhilfe* was actually a SED front organisation.³⁰

The subjects of the its donations were politicised as victims of West German capitalism: an advert in the *Berliner Zeitung* from October 1952 shows the *Sozialhilfe* advertised for donations from 50 *Pfennig* to ten *Deutschmark* for “West Berlin pensioners and evictees,”³¹ while another from August of the same year sought donations for unexplained “victims of the struggle for peace” in West Berlin.³²

Alongside the *Sozialhilfe*, the FDGB also supported workers in West Berlin. In 1952, for example, when pipe-layers from the West Berlin district of Neukölln went on strike for better wages, the FDGB offered them vouchers for meat, butter and sugar, as well as eight *Deutschmark* per family member.³³ Before the building of the wall in 1961 cut ties between West and East, solidarity efforts directed towards West German workers remained prominent, and were intrinsically tied to the idea that these workers’ struggles sought a unified Germany. In 1954 an appeal from the federal board of the FDGB claimed that a wave of strikes in West Germany were not only struggles for pay and bread, but also for “freedom and unity,” and described them as part of a “national struggle.”³⁴

Solidarity with socialist governments and movements abroad had always been an important feature of German solidarity campaigns, as Honecker’s example of solidarity donations to the Soviet Union show. Later on, Honecker would make this extension clear in his memoirs, claiming that the “solidarity of the workers among themselves as well as their solidarity with all those in the world who stand for freedom, human rights

³⁰ Matthias Willing, “Sozialistische Wohlfahrt”: die staatliche Sozialfürsorge in der Sowjetischen Besatzungszone und der DDR (1945-1990) (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 125.

³¹ “Solidaritätsaktion der Sozialhilfe,” *Berliner Zeitung*, 11. October 1952, 8.

³² “Aufruf der Sozialhilfe,” *Berliner Zeitung*, 27. August 1952, 6.

³³ “Versuch zum Streikbetrug scheitert,” *Berliner Zeitung*, 11. October, 1952, 8.

³⁴ SAPMO-BArch, DY 34/24271, “Übt Solidarität mit Westdeutschlands Werktätigen!,” 1-2.

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and social progress, has always been a characteristic feature of the revolutionary workers' movement....Today the GDR is respected all over the world as a country that supports the struggles of the peoples of Africa, Asia and Latin America in word and deed."³⁵ Although historic links between the German left and national liberation movements in the proto-socialist world were limited, the extension of solidarity to these movements was framed within a longer history of international socialist solidarity practices.³⁶ Important, for example, was the Spanish civil war; as Arnold Krammer has shown, 5000 Germans fought in the International Brigades during the civil war, mostly in the "Thälmann Battalion" named after the interwar KPD leader Ernst Thälmann, and of these many went on to take up important positions in the SED, including 13 members of the SED Central Committee, nine in the Politburo, and three in the Secretariat.³⁷

From the beginning of the 1950s signs were evident of an increasing focus on decolonising countries, and calls for solidarity with Vietnam³⁸ and Guatemala³⁹ made an appearance in the GDR press during the decade. The first instance of organised solidarity for countries in the proto-socialist world was the Korea Help Committee [Korea Hilfsausschuss] (KHC), which was set up after the outbreak of the Korean war in 1950 to co-ordinate and encourage donations from GDR citizens to the North Korean cause.⁴⁰ The Help Committee worked with the central committee of the

³⁵ Honecker, *From My Life*, 413-14.

³⁶ Links were sometimes made to the anti-colonial rhetoric of the pre-war SPD and, in particular, August Bebel. But for obvious reasons, GDR functionaries generally shied away from presenting SPD figures as forerunners. Furthermore, the SPD's anti-colonial credentials have long been the subject of fierce debate. On this, see Jens-Uwe Guettel, "The Myth of the Pro-Colonialist SPD: German Social Democracy and Imperialism before World War I," *Central European History* 45, no. 3 (2012): 452-84.

³⁷ Arnold Krammer, "The Cult of the Spanish Civil War in East Germany," *Journal of Contemporary History* 39, no. 4 (January 10, 2004): 531-60.

³⁸ "Zum Tag der internationalen Solidarität mit dem vietnamesischen Volk," *Neues Deutschland*, 24. November 1953, 4.

³⁹ "Solidarität der DDR," *Neues Deutschland*, 30. June 1954, p.5

⁴⁰ Reichardt, *Nie vergessen*, 43.

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People's Solidarity to distribute "collection lists" to different workplaces across the GDR, and was a precursor to the later focus on the proto-socialist world; in 1951, for example, the committee noted internally that the federal board of the FDGB had explained that collections for Korea were to take precedence over those for domestic or intra-German actions.⁴¹ The distribution of lists was accompanied, according to internal committee reports, by a "wide ranging awareness raising campaign regarding the crimes of intervention in Korea."⁴² The Korea collections foreshadowed much of what was to come with regard to solidarity donations. The FDGB began to map which areas were donating the most and which the least, setting the link between consciousness- and donation-raising in play for the first time.⁴³ In 1952, for example, the KHC criticised the FDGB for not working enough on the "Korea question" in the workplace, leading to a lack of donations.⁴⁴

Despite these legacies the GDR "turn" to the proto-socialist world represented something of a dramatic change at the end of the decade. With regard to solidarity, as in other areas, events in Africa provided the spark for a radical shift in policy. In 1960 the FDGB sent delegations to Guinea, Ghana, Togo, Nigeria, Cameroon and Mali, and in February of that year the "Fund for the Support of National Liberation Movements in African states and Dependant Territories" was set up.⁴⁵ The fund was originally attached to the national council of the National Front and its activities were co-ordinated

⁴¹ SAPMO-BArch, DY 34/19778, "Arbeitsplan des Korea-Hilfsausschusses für Dezember 1951 und Januar/Februar 1952," 1.

⁴² SAPMO-BArch, DY 34/19778, "Fördert den Aufbau Koreas! Aufruf des Korea-Hilfsausschusses beim Nationalrat," 2.

⁴³ In 1951, Dresden was the clear leader, contributing 5.2 percent of all donations GDR-wide. SAPMO-BArch, DY 34/19778, Letter from Fitzner to Reitz, 3.1.1952, 1-2.

⁴⁴ SAPMO-BArch, DY 34/19778, "Rundschreiben an die Korea-Hilfsausschüsse in den Ländern Brandenburg, Sachsen, Sachsen Anhalt, Thüringen, Mecklenburg und den Berliner Ausschuss."

⁴⁵ Andre Albrecht, "Das Institutionelle Erbe der DDR-Entwicklungspolitik: Was vom Solidaritätskomitee und den internationalen Bildungsstätten blieb," in *Ostalgie international: Erinnerungen an die DDR von Nicaragua bis Vietnam*, ed. Thomas Kunze (Berlin: Ch. Links Verlag, 2010), 167.

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by both the FDGB and an independent commission, although already by July of the same year it had become the “GDR Committee for Solidarity with the African People,” and thus gained a formally more independent role while in reality working closely with both party and the FDGB.⁴⁶ In 1963 the title was again changed to the “Afro-Asian Solidarity Committee of the GDR,” and in 1965 it became completely independent of the National Front, finally being renamed for the last time as the “Solidarity Committee of the GDR” in 1973.⁴⁷ The latter name change reflected a growing focus upon South America, particularly Chile, as an object of solidarity, just as the 1963 renaming reflected an increasing focus on Asia—most notably Vietnam, which would go on to become the largest recipient of GDR solidarity spending. As with numerous other examples, above all the FDGB institute for foreign students, we see a sort of geographical spiralling out of bodies originally set up in response to decolonisation in Africa, which would later come to encompass the entire proto-socialist world.

The Solidarity Committee was an “independent” organisation in name only. Achim Reichhardt, one of its former general secretaries, has described it anachronistically as a “civil society organisation.” According to Reichhardt, solidarity practices in the GDR took place on three different levels: the inter-state level, which consisted mostly of large scale development projects and the provision of credit, at the level of individual organisations, such as the FDJ, and at the level of the mass organisations, by which he refers to the solidarity donations of individual FDGB members.⁴⁸ However, like most state/society distinctions in the GDR, this division breaks down under careful scrutiny; in lieu of a ministry of development or foreign aid, solidarity initiatives were directed by

⁴⁶ Ilona Schleicher, “Das Solidaritätskomitee Der DDR Und Mosambik. Unterstützung Des Befreiungskampfes Und Entwicklungshilfe,” in *Die DDR Und Afrika: Zwischen Klassenkampf Und Neuem Denken*, ed. Ulrich van der Heyden, Hans-Georg Schleicher, and Ilona Schleicher (Münster: Lit, 1993), 193.

⁴⁷ *ibid.*

⁴⁸ Achim Reichhardt, “Die Internationale Solidaritätsarbeit Der DDR,” *Zeitschrift Für Sozialismus Und Frieden „offen-Siv,”* October 10, 2009.

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the SED Central Committee, and the three “levels” that Reichhardt refers to better represent a functional division of labour than independent sources of solidarity practice. In essence, the Solidarity Committee acted as an executive body for the SED Central Committee. Hans-Georg Schleicher, a former GDR diplomat, described its role as being to “mobilise, co-ordinate, organise and implement practical solidarity,” including co-ordinating the solidarity activities of all political and societal organisations. In the 1960s the committee was also responsible for international relations with national liberation movements, although the SED took over this role in the 1970s.⁴⁹

As Schleicher notes, there existed a huge discrepancy between the aims of the GDR’s solidarity operation—which sought to provide decisive support to multiple political movements across the globe, and ultimately to help to win nations round to the socialist camp—and the means at the disposal of the GDR government. This discrepancy is reflected in the large quantity of GDP devoted to assisting developing nations and national liberation movements: in 1982, according to John Metzler this alone amounted to 0.79 percent of the GDR’s national income, more than double the percentage seen in today’s Germany.⁵⁰ Of this sum, individual donations from GDR citizens amounted to roughly ten percent, a not insignificant total considering that the other 90 percent represented credit-intensive state-funded development projects.⁵¹ GDR functionaries were conscious of international comparisons. A Solidarity Committee report from the early 1980s noted that the UN recommendation was that developed countries should be donating 0.7 percent of their annual GDP to developing countries, and that western calculations had put the GDR’s figure at 0.037 percent, in

⁴⁹ Hans-Georg Schleicher, “GDR Solidarity: The German Democratic Republic and the South African Liberation Struggle,” in *The Road to Democracy in South Africa: Volume 3: International Solidarity, Parts 1 & 2*, by The South African Democracy Trust (Cape Town: Unisa Press, 2008).

⁵⁰ John J. Metzler, *Divided Dynamism: The Diplomacy of Separated Nations: Germany, Korea, China* (Lanham, Maryland: UPA, 2014), 28.

⁵¹ Metzler, 28.

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comparison with the FRG's 0.3 percent. Such a total, the report noted, was based on a "miscalculation" as it didn't take the GDR's price-control mechanisms in consideration. Revisions saw the number raised to 0.49 percent of GDP.⁵²

The sense that the GDR was punching above its weight in the international sphere was a common trope, if not always framed in positive terms. When West German journalist Marlies Menge visited the GDR in 1980 she reported hearing GDR citizens making a joke revolving around a group of American, Russian, and GDR citizens being captured by cannibals in the "bush," who said they would be barbecued unless they could explain something positive that their country had given the world. The American and the Russian spoke respectively of democracy and communism, and both were eaten. But when the GDR citizen explained where they came from, the cannibals beamed; "GDR - very good! GDR - Soli! The GDR donated us this barbecue."⁵³ Interestingly, Menge dissented from the standard line regarding solidarity donations being forced by the state. Rather, "for the GDR citizen, solidarity activity in underdeveloped countries pays off in more idealistic currency. For once, it gives one the unusual feeling that they are not the smaller and poorer relative of the West, but rather the rich, generous giver who helps the weak."⁵⁴

Unsurprisingly, African countries dominated as recipients in the early 1960s. In 1963, for example, the FDGB spent 4.75 million *Mark* on Africa, compared with 1

⁵² BArch, DZ 8/152, "Information zur Bewertung der Hilfeleistungen der DDR an Entwicklungsländer" pp.1-3. It should be noted here that GDP is an indicative but ultimately unreliable measure for state socialist societies. As Oscar Sanchez-Sibony writes, "how can one make a comparative assessment of an economy with an inconvertible currency and a command system that does not set prices according to supply and demand, and thus cannot measure relative scarcities?" Sanchez-Sibony, *Red Globalization*, 13.

⁵³ Marlies Menge, "Entwicklungshilfe der DDR: Beat und Borschtsch," *Die Zeit*, February 22, 1980, sec. Politik, <https://www.zeit.de/1980/09/beat-und-borschtsch>.

⁵⁴ *ibid.*

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million *Mark* in Cuba, Latin America and Asia, and 500,000 *Mark* in capitalist Europe.⁵⁵ Vietnam would go on to become the biggest recipient of solidarity throughout the GDR's history, however, with aid for the country sometimes dwarfing that of other countries. In 1975, for example, 110 million *Mark* in solidarity donations went to Vietnam, whereas the amounts for all other African and Asian countries amounted to only 30 million, with an additional five million spent on efforts in Chile.⁵⁶ Even after the end of the Vietnam war, spending continued to be focused on the rebuilding of the country. The Chinese invasion of Vietnam following its occupation of Cambodia in 1979 saw another spike in spending.⁵⁷ In 1980, Vietnam was still receiving 44 percent of all GDR solidarity aid, with Cambodia and Laos receiving 12.5 percent and 5.4 percent respectively⁵⁸

The process that determined what goods would be sent where wasn't particularly transparent, something that became an important issue as shortages increasingly defined perceptions of the GDR economy in its last two decades. For Vietnam, the biggest recipient of GDR solidarity, a special sub-committee of the Solidarity Committee was set up in 1965 to coordinate what resources would be sent.⁵⁹ Members of the committee could request specific deliveries of aid from the Council of Ministers, as happened in 1969 for example, when ten million *Mark* was given to the Vietnam sub-committee so that it could send supplies in response to an unspecified medical epidemic in Vietnam

⁵⁵ The money that went to Africa included 3 million *Mark* that went directly to African trade unions, and 1.75 million for the Committee for Solidarity with the African People. See SAPMO-BArch, DY 34/24759, "Plan der Solidaritätsmassnahmen des FDGB 1963," 4.

⁵⁶ SAPMO-BArch, DY 34/25412, "Antrag des Solidaritätsomitees der DDR auf Bereitstellung von Solidaritätsmitteln," 1.

⁵⁷ See a document a call for stronger solidarity with Vietnam due to "Chinese aggression" from the Solidarity Committee in 1979 BArch, DZ 8/736, "Vietnam braucht unserte verstärkte Solidarität."

⁵⁸ BArch, DZ 8/152, "Jahres-Abschluß-Analyse über die Erfüllung der materiellen Solidarität 1980," 1.

⁵⁹ Ilona Schleicher, "»Denk an Die Quelle ...," *Neues Deutschland*, July 17, 2010, 7.

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to which the secretary of the sub-committee had been alerted.⁶⁰ Otherwise, the form that donations would take were decreed either by intergovernmental agreements, or discussions between relevant foreign ministries.⁶¹ Flexibility was important: as the FDGB handbook noted, “regular monthly donations mean that the FDGB is always prepared to carry out large solidarity measures quickly and thus effectively.”⁶²

The FDGB as Fundraiser

How were these funds raised in practice? “Regarding the motives behind donations, one can only speculate,” writes Detlev Brunner.⁶³ What commentary that does exist on the subject often represents the FDGB—and the shop stewards who represented the organisation within the workplace—as a sort of disinterested tax collector. When a West German trade union official involved in the post-*Wende* transformation of the FDGB spoke later of the shop stewards, he claimed that “in principle, the FDGB didn’t exist. Its shop stewards didn’t have a function, aside from collecting trade union dues or selling solidarity marks...That was, in principle, all that existed at a workplace level.”⁶⁴ The FDGB-Lexicon project describes the donations as being “claimed” or “demanded” [eingefordert] by shop stewards, with rejection “taking place under conditions of a

⁶⁰ SAPMO-BArch, DY 34/25412, “Sekretariatsvorlage: Bereitstellung von 10 Millionen Mark für den Vietnam-Ausschuß,” 1

⁶¹ For example, a 1970 government treaty between the GDR and the Democratic Republic of Vietnam stipulated that the material equivalent of 30 million mark of GDR citizens’ donations would be delivered to Vietnam in that year. See BArch, DC 20-142420, “Bericht über die materielle Sicherung der Solidaritätsaktionen für den Zeitraum vom 1.1.1970 – 31.12.1970,” 2

⁶² Weber, *Die Gewerkschaftskasse*, 24.

⁶³ Brunner, “DDR „transnational.“ Die „internationale Solidarität“ der DDR,” 72.

⁶⁴ Manfred Scharer, *Der Aufbau einer freien Gewerkschaft in der DDR 1989/90: ÖTV und FDGB-Gewerkschaften im deutschen Einigungsprozess* (Göttingen: de Gruyter, 2011), 358.

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certain ‘moral’ pressure.” The authors of the Lexikon claim—incorrectly—that donations were tied to income, amounting to 20 percent of the monthly union dues paid.⁶⁵

The archival evidence complicates this picture in two ways. Firstly it reveals that a strong emphasis was placed on the transformative, socio-political nature of the solidarity donation: shop stewards were explicitly instructed not to act simply as tax collectors, but rather were issued with strict instructions to make sure that donations were accompanied by enthusiasm for the cause. Secondly the level of donations was (in theory at least) not set; indeed, the FDGB invested huge amounts of time and energy in monitoring these levels, often showing concern that they were not high enough and using them as a gauge of socialist consciousness in the GDR. Neither of these complications contradict the thesis that solidarity donations were subject to state pressure, nor that the FDGB was responsible for raising as much funding as possible. What they do, however, is resituate the solidarity donations as a site of conflict and negotiation between citizen and state; in the process becoming a lens through which we can analyse the effect the GDR’s turn to the proto-socialist world had on state-society relations.

The practice of collecting solidarity donations revolved—as much else in the GDR—around the workplace. Donations almost never took place in what could be deemed a “private” realm, with some key exceptions in later years. The principal method of donating took place through FDGB *Vertrauensleute*, or shop stewards. In a society dominated by the existence of unpaid state functionaries, *Vertrauensleute* were among the most ubiquitous.⁶⁶ Workplaces in the GDR were organised into *Gewerkschaftsgruppen*, or trade union groups of roughly 20 workers, each of which elected a *Vertrauensmann*, a title that belied the fact that by the 1980s over half of all

⁶⁵ “Solidaritätsmarke” FDGB-Lexikon, accessed December 1, 2018, http://library.fes.de/FDGB-Lexikon/rahmen/lexikon_frame.html The lexikon is a project run by the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung to provide an overview of the FDGB’s structure. .

⁶⁶ Fulbrook estimates that one in six of the population were involved in the “micro-systems of power through which GDR society worked.” Fulbrook, *The People’s State*, 236.

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shop stewards were actually women.⁶⁷ The state made sure that solidarity culture flowed through these trade union groups: groups attended meetings together, donated together, and wrote petitions and letters together. As Renate Hürtgen writes, these functionaries thus “belonged to the everyday experience of over nine million workers in the GDR.”⁶⁸ Solidarity coupons were purchased from the *Vertrauensleute* and then affixed in the trade unionist handbook.

⁶⁷ Hürtgen, *Zwischen Disziplinierung und Partizipation*, 178.

⁶⁸ *ibid.*, 10.

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Name des Mitgliedes

Nachweis über Beitragszahlungen und den Erwerb von Solidaritätsmarken

	19...87		19...88		19...89		19...90	
	Lohn	Solidarität	Lohn	Solidarität	Lohn	Solidarität	Lohn	Solidarität
Januar	Lohn 18,-	18,-	Lohn 18,-	18,-	Lohn 21,-	20,-	Lohn 10,-	13,-
Februar	Lohn 18,-	18,-	Lohn 18,-	18,-	Lohn 15,-	20,-	Lohn 12,-	
März	Lohn 18,-	18,-	Lohn 18,-	18,-	Lohn 21,-	20,-	Lohn 10,-	4,-
April	Lohn 18,-	18,-	Lohn 5,-50	5,-	Lohn 21,-	20,-	16,-46 Ge.	
Mai	Lohn 18,-	10,-	Lohn 5,-	5,-	Lohn 21,-	20,-	6,-kr	
Juni	Lohn 18,-	18,-	Lohn 18,-	18,-	Lohn 12,-	20,-	1.-kr 10.7.90 Rg.	
Juli	Lohn 18,-	18,-	Lohn 18,-	18,-	Lohn 21,-	20,-	1.-kr 10.7.90 Rg.	
August	Lohn 18,-	18,-	Lohn 18,-	18,-	Lohn 21,-	20,-		
Sept.	Lohn 10,-	10,-	Lohn 18,-	18,-	Lohn 21,-	20,-		
Oktober	Lohn 5,-50	5,-	Lohn 18,-	18,-	Lohn 21,-	20,-		
Nov.	Lohn 5,-50	5,-	Lohn 21,-	18,-	Lohn 21,-	20,-		
Dezember	Lohn 13,-	15,-	Lohn 21,-	20,-	Lohn 21,-			

Figure 1: A trade union handbook, with the column for solidarity donations next to trade union dues. Note that payments stop in December 1989. DDR Museum, Inventarnummer 1003727.

In 1960, new membership books introduced by the FDGB added a monthly solidarity donation column to the union contributions table. This move, alongside the “initiatives of workers to support striking Belgian workers and the liberation struggles of the Congolese and Cuban peoples” was credited in generating a drastic growth in donations, as, a report noted, “members are now constantly reminded of their obligation to practice

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solidarity alongside paying their union dues.”⁶⁹ As Figure One shows, the amounts given varied from month to month. A minimum donation of 50 *Pfennig* was introduced in 1962.⁷⁰ Importantly, the collective platform through which solidarity donations were carried out was formalised in the public handing over of a *Solidaritätsschecken* (solidarity checks) by individual groups or collectives to the Solidarity Committee at public congresses or meetings, which represented the sum total of individual donations over a set period.⁷¹

Alongside these monthly collections, so-called *Sonderspende* (special donations) took place in various forms. Despite having the appearance of spontaneous collective efforts to donate solidarity, they tended to be orchestrated by the state. Indeed, as we will see, while the FDGB claimed that GDR citizens’ desire to contribute was what drove the entire operation, the party-state sought to direct and encase such drives within the frameworks that they themselves dictated, often creating tension in the process. For example, in 1985 a teaching collective in the Freidrich Engels High School in Potsdam sought to raise funds for victims of an earthquake in Mexico and caused the eruption of a conflict with the trade union leadership over whether the money raised should be directly donated to the state solidarity bank account or the FDGB solidarity account. As a Stasi-operated IM within the group reported, “we know that our monthly contributions...are in part at least used for international relations” with the USSR in particular picked out as a recipient. Such knowledge, the report writer noted, gave rise to citizens asking themselves what exactly solidarity was for.⁷²

⁶⁹ SAPMO-BArch, DY 34/24693, “Präsidiumsvorlage: Aufstellung des Haushaltsplanes des FDGB für das Jahr 1962,” 10.

⁷⁰ SAPMO-BArch, DY 34/24693, “Erläuterungen zur Haushaltsplanung des FDGB für 1963.”

⁷¹ Reichardt, *Nie vergessen*, 94.

⁷² Behörde für die Unterlagen des Staatssicherheitsdienstes der ehemaligen Deutschen Demokratischen Republik, Staatssicherheitsdienst das Ministerium für Staatssicherheit (hereafter BStU, MfS), BV Pdm, KD Nau, Nr. 285, Band II, “Information zur Solidaritätsaktion Mexico an der Freidrich-Engels-OS,” 174-175.

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Donations could emerge out of events, or meetings as the Mexico one did. Another common practice was the *Solidaritätsbasar* (solidarity bazaar) which involved jumble sales at which money was raised for specific causes.⁷³ Specific solidarity drives or “actions” were also organised by the state, which saw donations of blood, sewing machines, or bicycles for Vietnam, for example.⁷⁴ From 1957 the Berlin-based radio station *Stimme die DDR* held an annual solidarity campaign entitled *Dem Frieden die Freiheit*, which featured concerts and musical releases. The campaign raised over 40 million *Mark* up until 1974, when it began to be held in conjunction with the FDGB.⁷⁵ The so-called *Solikoncert* that year featured Chilean artists, in line with the GDR’s focus upon the victims of the recently-established Pinochet regime in Chile, and the FDGB claimed it raised over 6 million *Mark*.⁷⁶ The campaign raised funds by encouraging GDR citizens to either phone-in or fill out slips that were featured in newspapers which allowed them to request that specific songs would be performed at the concerts in return for solidarity donations; the forms contained columns for trade union groups, and

⁷³ For example see BStU, MfS, BV Ddn, Abt. XX, Nr. 10391, Band 3.

⁷⁴ Reichardt, *Nie vergessen*, 64.

⁷⁵ “Solidarität hat viele Gesichter,” *Neue Zeit*, 13. November 1974, 4.

⁷⁶ *ibid.*

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applicants had to indicate how many solidarity marks they had donated, with the slips signed off by FDGB shop stewards.⁷⁷

Not all donations took a collective form. Citizens could also donate by purchasing solidarity stamps produced by the Ministry for Post and Telecommunications, the price of which contained set donations to specific solidarity campaigns. For example the Ministry launched the “invincible Vietnam” [*unbesiegbares Vietnam*] series in 1966, for

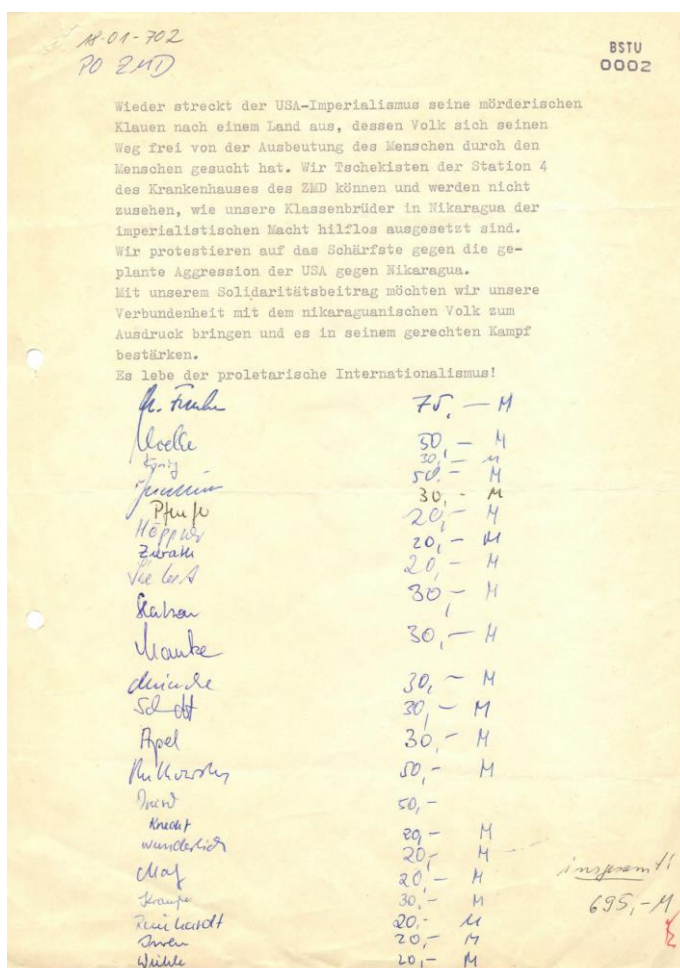


Figure 2: A "special collection" for Nicaragua with individual donations.

BSU, MIS, SED-Kreisleitung, Nr. 5654, p.2

example, which donated five Pfennig for each stamp bought to the Solidarity

⁷⁷ "Solidarität jetzt erst Recht!" *Neue Zeit*, 27. November 1974, 8; The 6 million claim can be found in "6 329 919 Mark kamen auf das Konto 88 8 88," *Neue Zeit*, 22. November 1974, 2.

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Committee.⁷⁸ Posters requesting donations directly to the *Solidaritätsonto* produced individual donations, and some citizens even left the Solidarity Committee in their wills.⁷⁹ The vast majority of solidarity donations, however, came from the sale of solidarity coupons.⁸⁰ This meant that they took place on a collective level, which undoubtedly created a sense of pressure. While worker's dues were calculated according to income level, solidarity donations were not.⁸¹

While consciousness-raising remained an important priority for the FDGB, this didn't eschew an obsessive focus on the revenue produced by these donations. The FDGB publicly claimed that the vast majority of workers—for example over 90 percent in 1973—donated regular monthly amounts.⁸² This chimed with internal reports, which took great care to map contributions in different *Bezirke*.⁸³ The same internal reports framed the almost continual rise in donations as a sign of rising internationalist consciousness in the GDR. Indeed, later on, former solidarity officials such as Ilona Schleicher would claim that the whole edifice of state solidarity was created only *in response* to citizens' desire to make donations.⁸⁴ In the first half of 1961, donations—which were often measured by the FDGB as a percentage of trade union dues—rose from six percent to ten percent of the total amount of due contributions, a considerable overfulfillment of the plan which, as we have seen earlier, was put down to both increased support for national liberation struggles and new trade union handbooks.

⁷⁸ "Unbesiegbares Vietnam," *Neues Deutschland*, 15. October, 1966, 6.

⁷⁹ See for example the files contained in BArch, DZ 8/734.

⁸⁰ Schleicher, "Das Solidaritätskomitee Der DDR Und Mosambik. Unterstützung Des Befreiungskampfes Und Entwicklungshilfe," 194.

⁸¹ Perhaps the reason for the commonly held misconception that solidarity donations were tied to income level. Weber, *Die Gewerkschaftskasse*, 8.

⁸² "Viele Millionen Mark als Zeichen der Soldarität," *Berliner Zeitung*, 24. December 1973, p.1

⁸³ See for example a report from 1962 which lists Leipzig, Karl-Marx-Stadt, Suhl and Rostock as showing "good results in the linking of the membership to the solidarity movement" while Berlin, Dresden and Potsdam showed "inadequate results." SAPMO-BArch, DY 34/24693, "Direktive für die Aufstellung des Haushaltplanes des FDGB für das Jahr 1962," 2.

⁸⁴ Schleicher, "»Denk an Die Quelle ...«."

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Despite these successes of both consciousness-raising and practicality, the FDGB report demanded the undertaking of further efforts to convince members to carry out regular solidarity.⁸⁵ These demands were prescient, as the rate sunk back down to 8.1 percent in the second half of the year.⁸⁶ At that point the FDGB reported that roughly 70 to 75 percent of their members were regularly donating, with the highest estimates being in Leipzig (85 percent) and the lowest in Frankfurt (60 percent).⁸⁷

Citizen's responses to the Solidarity Donation

What did citizens make of this persistent and ubiquitous campaign for donations? The obvious assumption is that citizens simply “went along” with the demands of an authoritarian state. This was of course true in many cases; but not always. For many GDR citizens, for example, there was a natural link between experiences of war and displacement and the practice of solidarity. As a former GDR citizen told Cordia Schlegelmilch, her experiences of resettlement in 1947, and the “people who showed us solidarity during our most difficult hour,” meant that “it was never a problem for me, that when I paid my union dues, I also paid solidarity marks.”⁸⁸ How much one donated tended to be public knowledge. Individual citizens, by donating higher amounts, could force others into also doing so in order to save face. In former GDR citizen Thomas Brussig's post-*Wende* novel *Wie es Leuchtet* (How it Shines) one such worker is shamed into donating higher amounts, and thus becomes known disparagingly by her

⁸⁵ SAPMO-BArch, DY 34/25412, “Direktive für die Aufstellung des Haushaltsplanes des FDGB für das Jahr 1962,” 10.

⁸⁶ SAPMO-BArch, DY 34/24693, “Gesamthaushalt des FDGB für das Jahr 1963,” 8.

⁸⁷ *ibid.*

⁸⁸ Cordia Schlegelmilch, “„Wurzeln beginnt mit W, das ist schon immer so gewesen.“ Zusammenleben in einer sächsischen Kreisstadt vor und nach 1989. Empirische Ergebnisse einer ostdeutschen Gemeindestudie.,” *Bios. Zeitschrift für Biographieforschung, Oral History und Lebensverlaufsanalysen* 18, no. 1 (2005): 53.

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colleagues as *ein ganz Überzeugte*: a “a true believer.”⁸⁹ Marlies Menge reported being told by a GDR citizen in 1980 that, having begun by donating only 50 *Pfennig*, donations in their workplace had risen thanks to an “over-zealous” worker who donated two *Mark*, and was subsequently followed by others.⁹⁰

As with any other facet of GDR life, the Stasi played a role in monitoring solidarity culture, and Stasi files are one of the richest, if somewhat skewed, sources on citizen’s responses to requests for donations. Anti-state graffiti documented by the security services provide one clue. The Stasi frequently photographed such graffiti, with photos stored in folders entitled *Schmiererin*, meaning “defacements” or “smearings.” One such folder from the district of Leipzig contains an undated photo of what appears to be a piece of material upon which the words “SOLIDARITATS FOND/WASCHE” have been painted in spray paint (see Figure Three). There is no explanatory material accompanying the photo. We can only see its size from an accompanying measuring device. It has also clearly been removed from somewhere, as shown by the frayed edges of the material. Its meaning, literally “solidarity fund/washing,” is unclear at first sight. It is obvious that the Stasi thought it political, however, and the neglected umlauts suggest a haste on the part of the author that may have derived from the same conclusion.

⁸⁹ Thomas Brussig, *Wie es leuchtet: Roman* (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer Verlag, 2015), 250.

⁹⁰ Menge, “Entwicklungshilfe der DDR.”



Figure 3: BStU, MfS, BV Lpz, KD Lpz-Stadt, Foto, Nr. 5851, Bild 11.

One possible interpretation is of a “cleaning out” of a corrupt solidarity fund, although this would be a strange choice of phrasing. More likely is that the writer intended to make a link with money laundering: *Geld waschen* in German, with the noun for money, *Geld*, replaced by solidarity fund. This may have been a variation of the criticism sometimes made in the West that the solidarity fund was a means of funding immoral practices abroad beneath a cloak of respectability.⁹¹ But it could also

⁹¹ See for example Johann Althaus, “So Versorgte Die DDR Terroristen Mit Waffen,” *Die Welt*, November 29, 2017, <https://www.welt.de/geschichte/article171067441/Die-brisanten-DDR-Waffenexporte-an-internationale-Terroristen.html>.

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be a comment on the monetary function of solidarity payments within the GDR's financial system. Indeed, there is evidence that other GDR citizens had drawn the same links, as evidenced by another joke recorded by both Marlies Menge and the Stasi on different occasions in the 1980s. The joke functions upon the basis that the state had decided to divide salaries into four parts: a quarter in West German *Mark*, which can be used in the hard currency-only "Intershops"; a quarter in dollars, with which one can travel; a quarter in *Zloty* so that one has a full wallet; and a quarter in GDR *Mark* with which one can pay union dues and buy solidarity coupons.⁹²

The joke plays on a widely recognised truth regarding the use-value of the *Ostmark*, which, by means of its non-convertibility and the lack of consumer goods available in the domestic GDR market had largely lost the principle function of a "normal" currency: to act as a universal medium of exchange. With basic goods heavily subsidised and expensive consumer goods scant, the percentage of the GDR's total money supply tied up in savings was high, stabilizing around 85 to 87 percent in the 1970s.⁹³ The form that solidarity donations took—outside of interstate agreements, almost exclusively goods or services produced in the GDR by state-owned firms—means that the solidarity donation thus functioned as a stimulus to increase the velocity of money circulation in the GDR while providing an outlet for a system of production defined by quantity over quality.⁹⁴

Money that might have gone into savings accounts could be recycled through the solidarity committee, who collected it and sent it back into workers' pockets via purchases of goods, with a resulting payoff for international solidarity. To take 1962 as an example, solidarity "measures," as the FDGB called them, consisted of funding the education of foreign students at the FDGB's *Hochschule* in Bernau, the training of

⁹² Cited in Michael Richter, *Die friedliche Revolution: Aufbruch zur Demokratie in Sachsen 1989-90* (Berlin: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2009), 178-79; A similar version of the joke is reported by Marlies Menge, see Menge, "Entwicklungshilfe der DDR."

⁹³ Adam Zwass and Michael C. Vale, "Money, Banking, and Credit in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe," *Eastern European Economics* 17, no. 1/2 (1978): 21.

⁹⁴ On the quantity over quality issue, see Steiner, *The Plans That Failed*, 8.

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individual foreign trade unionists within workplaces in the GDR, the granting of medical treatment to individuals as designated by the FDGB department for foreign relations, and an array of thousands of goods, from cameras to motorbikes.⁹⁵ Material solidarity was coordinated with the State Planning Commission, which had to give “clearance” to requests for material, presumably in order to avoid the delivery of items which were short in the GDR.⁹⁶ The material sent was often highly specific. Deliveries to Vietnam funded by the solidarity committee in 1970, for example, consisted of 6,000 backpack sprayers for agricultural use along with various relevant parts, 5,000 bicycle brakes and 1,000 bicycle lights, 550 tonnes of hessian sacks, and 250 tonnes of broth stock, among numerous other goods.⁹⁷ Later on the Mittag Commission and the broader “rationalisation” of GDR relations with the proto-socialist world in light of the state’s debt crisis from the late 1970s onwards had a serious effect on the form of solidarity donations. In 1981 the Solidarity Committee was charged with reducing its material support to the tune of 90 million *Mark* in order to cover the cost of educating students from the proto-socialist world that had previously been paid for by the state, and in the same year it was made a requirement that the SED Central Committee was consulted as well as the State Planning Commission about requests for deliveries of material.⁹⁸ Following the tenth SED Party congress in the same year, the Solidarity Committee committed to concentrating solidarity efforts on those countries that represented particular importance to the GDR on “political and economic levels,” as well as making sure solidarity “supported accompanying goals in foreign policy and trade.”⁹⁹

⁹⁵ SAPMO-BArch, DY 34/24602, “Sekretariatsvorlage: Solidaritätsmassnahmen des FDGB 1962,” Anlage 2, 1-5.

⁹⁶ *ibid.*, 4.

⁹⁷ BArch, DC 20-I42420, “Bericht über die materielle Sicherung der Solidaritätsaktionen für den Zeitraum vom 1.1.1970 - 31.12.1970,” Anlage 2, 2.

⁹⁸ BArch, DZ 8/152, “Zur Erfüllung der materiellen Solidarität 1983.”

⁹⁹ BArch, DZ 8/152, “Bericht über den Einsatz der Mittel des Solidaritätskomitees der DDR und die erzielten Ergebnisse für die Aussenpolitik und Aussenwirtschaft der DDR im Jahre 1981,” 1-2.

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The drive to rationalise GDR solidarity spending from the late 1970s onward also produced one of the most interesting examples of conflict between state and society thrown up by the existence of solidarity donations. As part of the rationalisation drive in 1982, Mittag and the FDGB chairman Harry Tisch attempted to shift the maximum individual donation from 50 *Mark* down to ten, which was justified as an attempt to avoid a competition developing between different groups that could lead to “overexertion.” Given that such competition had been actively encouraged, this was a bizarre claim. Indeed, in truth the SED had begun to acknowledge that matching citizens donations with material solidarity was becoming increasingly difficult for the GDR. Perhaps surprisingly, the attempt to lower the maximum donation failed and was withdrawn in 1983 in the face of criticism from GDR citizens who “openly wanted *not* to donate less,” as Detlev Brunner has shown.¹⁰⁰ The reasons for this enthusiasm are unclear. Was this a sign that the GDR elites were eventually outstripped in enthusiasm for the proto-socialist world by their own citizens or rather a sign of the functional societal importance that donations had taken on, thanks to their ability to turn mostly meaningless *Ostmark* into more valuable social currency? Either way the episode challenges the notion that donations took on a mostly perfunctory form.

Like much else in the GDR, the income from solidarity donations was planned, and then assessed, in terms of plan fulfilment. The existence of the plan, alongside constant exhortations to continue to drive the level of contributions up, sits uncomfortably with the frequent assertion on the part of the FDGB that solidarity was a largely “bottom up” process. To take 1964 for example, in an internal FDGB report a rise in solidarity donations was put down to the fact that “thoughts of proletarian internationalism and brotherly solidarity are more than ever a mobilising factor among the working class.”¹⁰¹ Yet at the same time the FDGB federal board demanded that “solidarity income must

¹⁰⁰ Brunner, “DDR „transnational.“ Die „internationale Solidarität“ der DDR,” 72.

¹⁰¹ SAPMO-BArch, DY 34/24693, “Direktive für die Aufstellung des Haushaltsplanes des FDGB für das Jahr 1964,” 3

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be raised: all sources of solidarity income are to be identified and exploited” and warned against plan “polishing.”¹⁰² If the FDGB’s solidarity income did indeed reflect a rising consciousness, this seemed to peak around 1979: both Ilona Schleicher and Achim Reichhardt have attempted to chart yearly totals for citizen contributions and have produced different although broadly corresponding results. Income hovered around the two million Mark level until it saw a drastic rise in 1966 to about 20 million Mark thanks to the founding of the Vietnam committee. It then steadily climbed, reaching a high point in 1979 (of 227 million according Schleicher, or 323 million according to Reichhardt), settling down to the 200 million mark for the rest of the 1980s.¹⁰³

Beyond Fundraising: Raising Internationalist *Bewusstsein*

The emphasis on raising socialist internationalist consciousness as well as cash was part of a broader focus for the FDGB.¹⁰⁴ Indeed, the apparent contradiction between the “bottom up” and “top down” assessments was no contradiction for the FDGB, which saw its job as one of consciousness raising;; in that regard, higher donations were framed simply as evidence of success. As the largest of the GDR’s “mass organisations,” the FDGB played a pivotal role in everyday life in the GDR. From its onset the it was deeply involved in pedagogical activities: one of the key resolutions of the FDGB’s Fifth Congress in 1959 was a demand that the FDGB strive to further strengthen its role as a “school of communism,” at a period when solidarity donations began to climb

¹⁰² SAPMO-BArch, DY 34/24693, “Direktive für die Aufstellung des Haushaltsplanes für das Jahr 1962,” 2.

¹⁰³ Reichardt, *Nie vergessen*, 315; Schleicher, “Das Solidaritätskomitee Der DDR Und Mosambik. Unterstützung Des Befreiungskampfes Und Entwicklungshilfe,” 150.

¹⁰⁴ Socialist consciousness raising is not to be confused with notion of consciousness raising as deployed by feminists in the US from the 1960s. Rather, the raising of what the FDGB called sozialistisches Bewusstsein involved, to quote Herbert Warnke, “working not on the basis of personal material compensation, but instead working for and being conscious of the overall development of the material and cultural living conditions of society.” Quoted in the FDGB Lexicon: “FDGB-Lexikon.”

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significantly.¹⁰⁵ This meant explicit instruction to avoid the very kind of ritualization described by Reimann at the beginning of this chapter. As an official FDGB handbook for functionaries from 1974 noted: “...those workplace and local union leaders who will only practice solidarity at particular events, or who only seek to recruit those colleagues who already regularly practice solidarity when collecting for additional donations, are guilty of misjudging the moral-political content of solidarity and seeing only the financial results.”¹⁰⁶ It was “important that people felt that they wanted to raise their solidarity donations” an internal FDGB district executive report for Berlin in 1975 noted, “not feel that they must or should.”¹⁰⁷

Of course, that the FDGB felt the need to warn its functionaries of the dangers of allowing solidarity donations to slip into too much of a focus on financial results suggests that there were some cases where this was indeed happening. Other forms of pressure could also be applied. A cartoon that appeared in the *Berliner Zeitung* in 1973 (see Figure Five) mocked workers who didn't donate: three workers are depicted in a factory, with one reading a newspaper with the headline “GDR solidarity shipment for Chile.” The caption is a conversation between the workers: “What's that, we are all in the paper? On which page?” asks the worker with the paper in his hand. The others respond, laughing, “Obviously on the first page: or have you not donated any solidarity marks? Well, there you go.”

¹⁰⁵ SAPMO-BArch, DY 34/24693, “Aufstellung des Haushaltsplanes des FDGB für das Jahr 1962,” 9.

¹⁰⁶ Weber, *Die Gewerkschaftskasse*, 25–26.

¹⁰⁷ BStU, MfS, SED-Kreisleitung, Nr. 1749, “FDGB-Kreisvorstand 19, Berlin, 03.08.1975,” 34.

The state's sensitivity to criticism regarding solidarity donations suggests their importance, and shows that rather than being subject to ritualization, solidarity practices were shot through with conflict. Solidarity was not like other topics within the GDR's "grumbling *Gesellschaft*," where a certain level of complaint was allowed as long as it



Figure 5: Berliner Zeitung, 31. August, 1973, 2.

didn't cross the boundaries of what Andrew Port has called the "overtly political."¹⁰⁸ The Stasi recorded "negative" views and often sought punishment for them. For party members, refusing to donate and calling solidarity coupons "*Scheiß und Dreck*," (shit and filth), as one citizen from Cottbus did, was enough for the Stasi to suggest a review

¹⁰⁸ Andrew I. Port, *Conflict and Stability in the German Democratic Republic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 103, 115.

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of membership status.¹⁰⁹ Others couched complaints regarding solidarity within domestic economic concerns, which were keenly recorded by the Stasi. An IM report from 1985, for example, noted that workers in Weißensee had privately complained about donating to Nicaragua; one said that they wouldn't "throw my money out of the window so that 13- and 14-year olds can play war games," while another complained that that if they had to pay 120 *Mark* for a pair of shoes then they couldn't afford five *Mark* for solidarity.¹¹⁰ A letter from a GDR citizen to the FRG complaining about solidarity donations being raised for Poland despite shortages "wherever one looks" in the GDR was intercepted by the Stasi in Rostock.¹¹¹

Such links to shortages in the GDR were common in the late 1970s and 1980s. An IM report from 1979 in Bischofswerda was typical in noting that "discussions in the last few days have been dominated by specific shortages and weaknesses in provision, particularly that we have lacked specific items for thirty years now. This lack is seen as being connected to the victory in Vietnam, in that the GDR has committed enormous sums to the Vietnamese when they were not able to meet the needs of their own population."¹¹² Another common concern, a typical example of which was recorded in Cottbus in 1978, revolved around a lack of information regarding what was done with solidarity donations.¹¹³ This became an increasing concern in the era of *Glasnost* and shortage. By 1989 the review commission of the Solidarity Committee was noting with concern that there was a growing demand from citizens for information about the destination of solidarity donations.¹¹⁴

¹⁰⁹ BStU, MfS, BV Cottbus, AKG, Nr. 7913, "das parteiunwürdige Verhalten des Genossen [redacted]," 74.

¹¹⁰ BStU, MfS, BV Berlin, AKG, Nr. 4847, "Stimmung und Reaktion der Bevölkerung des Stadtbezirkes Weißensee," 4.

¹¹¹ BStU, MfS, BV Rostock, KD Stralsund, Nr. 99, Band 2, undated letter, 199-200.

¹¹² BStU, MfS, BV Dresden, KD Bischofswerda, Nr. 51928, untitled, 45.

¹¹³ BStU, MfS, BV Cottbus, AKG, Nr. 5332, "die Reaktion der Bevölkerung," 8.

¹¹⁴ BAArch, DZ 8/733, "Bericht über Schwerpunkte in der Eingabenarbeitung 1988/89," 2.

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The seriousness and commitment that the state displayed not just towards fundraising but also to ensuring that feelings of socialist internationalism remained strong among the population gave ample opportunity for resistance; although such examples are few and far between. Within the Stasi archives occasional reports do display a propensity for GDR citizens to manifest their *Eigen-Sinn* in response to requests for solidarity donations. One particularly illustrative case in Cottbus, where students defaced a signature list in a gallery, is worth quoting at length, for it documents well both the forms that GDR citizens' *Eigen-Sinn* took, and the almost comedic seriousness with which the Stasi responded to them:

Lists had been placed in the gallery (white paper, roughly 1 meter long and 40 cm wide), on which the children could register their support with the struggling people of Vietnam. A thousand such signatures were placed on these lists. When the lists were checked, however, it was established that seventy of these signatures were graffiti, slanderous or abusive. Names such as 'Leonid Brezhnev,' 'Pippi Longstockings,' 'Erich Honecker,' 'Udo Jürgens,' 'Andro,' 'Charter,' 'Einstein,' 'Kaiser Wilhelm the second,' 'Bismarck,' 'Thälmann,' 'Rembrandt,' 'Sexy,' 'Willi Stoph,' featured, as well as the star of David and three crosses. Taken together the 'signatures' can be divided into four groups: the names of statesmen, the names of youth idols from the arts, mostly from the West, obscenities and crosses, and figures from the past who have played a dishonourable role in German history, as well as those who have carried out great achievements in science and art. Although the culprits were not found, the teachers were chastised for failing in their 'supervisory duties,' and it was deemed likely that a large amount of the students bore an 'unstable attitudes' and 'Western orientations.'¹¹⁵

¹¹⁵ BStU, MfS, BV Cottbus, AKG, Nr. 5646, "festgestellte Schmierereien auf einer Unterschriftensammlung in der Galerie der Freundschaft," 590-592.

Policing the Discursive Boundaries of Solidarity

This chapter concludes with a micro-study of a collection of letters sent to the editor of the regional newspaper, the *Sächsische Zeitung (SZ)*, on the issue of solidarity from the late 1970s to the mid-1980s. The selection of this apparently arbitrary source-base requires some explanation. During the research process, requests for material relating to solidarity were sent out to different regional branches of the Stasi *Unterlagen*, the government ministry charged with maintaining and granting access to the Stasi archive. The search yielded a large amount of letters sent to the editor of the *SZ* from the Stasi department “XX” in the district of Dresden. Department XX was one of the most important Stasi *Abteilungen*, and had an expansive role which included monitoring almost all aspects of collective life in the GDR, as well as preventing and combating underground political activity.¹¹⁶ The letters’ very presence in the archive alone make them an interesting source base: it is unclear whether they were sent to the Stasi by an overly cautious editor, or as a matter of routine, or whether this was a widespread practice. What is fascinating is that almost none of the letters represent outright resistance, or indeed *Eigen-Sinn*. Instead, they run the gamut from complete endorsement to partial adjustment of the state’s solidarity narratives. That such a corpus ended up in the hands of the Stasi is revealing. Furthermore, the decisions to publish or not publish the letters reveal that even positive affirmations of solidarity were deemed unpublishable unless they followed the strict guidelines of the state.

¹¹⁶ For more on Hauptabteilung XX, see: Thomas Auerbach et al., *Hauptabteilung XX: Staatsapparat, Blockparteien, Kirchen, Kultur, “politischer Untergrund”* (Berlin: Bundesbeauftragter f. d. Unterlagen d. Staatssicherheitsdienstes d. ehem. DDR, 2012).

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Further to this, the editing process itself is illuminating. All newspapers edit their readers' letters for the sake of clarity and space. But in a "highly politicised society"¹¹⁷ such as the GDR, and a newspaper with explicit links to the ruling party—the *SZ* was the official organ of the SED's Dresden directorate—the editing of political statements is bound to invite analysis. On first appearance, such explicit editing might be read in a Foucauldian sense as falling under the rubric of the "production of discourse," in which discourse is "controlled, selected, organised, and redistributed" in order to "avert its powers and its dangers."¹¹⁸ But the intentional, strategic political purpose of such editing sits in contrast with Foucault's notion of panopticism, where external forms of punishment and surveillance are replaced by self-driving, internal forms of control.¹¹⁹ The state may well have attempted to create what Martin Sabrow has called a "discursive prison" (*Diskursgefängnis*), but the evidence here suggests that this was not entirely successful in Foucauldian terms.¹²⁰ Indeed, explicit censorship may be read as a sign of weakness, not strength, on the part of the state. As Pierre Bourdieu notes, the more effective the discursive regime, the less it needs to "manifest itself in the form of explicit prohibitions, imposed and sanctioned by an institutionalized authority...Censorship is never quite as perfect or as invisible as when each agent has nothing to say apart from what [s]he is objectively authorized to say: in this case [s]he does not even have to be his own censor because [s]he is, in a way, censored once and for all, through the forms of

¹¹⁷ Ina Merkel, "The GDR - A Normal Country in the Centre of Europe," in *Power And Society In The GDR, 1961-1979: The "Normalisation of Rule"?*, ed. Mary Fulbrook (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2013), 194.

¹¹⁸ Michel Foucault, "The Discourse on Language," in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, trans. Alan Sheridan Smith (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972), 216.

¹¹⁹ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (London: Penguin, 1991), 195-231.

¹²⁰ Martin Sabrow, "Der staatssozialistische Geschichtsdiskurs im Spiegel seiner Gutachtenpraxis," in *Verwaltete Vergangenheit: Geschichtskultur und Herrschaftslegitimation in der DDR*, ed. Martin Sabrow (Leipzig: Akademische Verlagsanstalt, 1997), 11.

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perception and expression that [s]he has internalized.”¹²¹ These letters thus show that the discourse surrounding solidarity remained an active field of contestation in the GDR through to the 1980s.¹²²

Many of the letters were responses to journalism-specific solidarity campaigns that the SZ took part in, alongside collective affirmations of solidarity or notifications of solidarity actions. Collectives who undertook such actions often wrote in to the newspaper to show off their successes. Group 92 of the Democratic Women’s League of Germany [*Demokratische Frauenbund Deutschlands*] (DFD) for example, wrote in July 1981 to boast of their *Solibasar* in which the sale of handmade children’s clothes, tablecloths, and cushions raised 470 *Mark* for the solidarity account.¹²³ The choir of group 90 of the DFD wrote in December 1984 to report on their end-of-year event, of which they hoped the SZ would write an “appraisal” (*Würdigung*). The chairperson of the group described the program of music and recitations which concluded with a *Solibasar* that raised 506 *Mark* for the solidarity account.¹²⁴ Neither letter was published. It may be significant that both involved stories regarding individuals; the 1981 letter spoke of the oldest member of the group participating enthusiastically, while the 1984 letter described events as happening “under the leadership of the teacher, Frau Rasch.” A common feature of editing was the removal of sentences that focused on individuals. One letter from the “Julius Fučík” brigade at the Mikromat enterprise in Dresden was published with the name of the Brigade leader removed and a passage which criticised “racist murder in South Africa, mass arrests and human rights abuses in Chile, and

¹²¹ Pierre Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*, trans. Gino Raymond and Matthew Adamson (Cambridge: Polity, 1991), 138.

¹²² For a prominent example of this argument regarding ritualization, see Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever, until It Was No More*.

¹²³ BStU, MfS BV Dresden Abteilung XX, Nr. 10391, Band 1, “Versprechen eingelöst,” 17 July, 1981.

¹²⁴ BStU, MfS BV Dresden, Abteilung XX Nr. 10391, Band 3, Letter from Group 90, 10.12.1984.

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counter-revolutionary activities in Nicaragua” excised.¹²⁵ Indeed, in most cases where letters were published, the editors crossed out individual names of the authors, leaving only the collective or group.¹²⁶

That collectivism was clearly the order of the day did not stop the letters acting as forceful displays of individual opinions on solidarity. They often revealed a critical, thoughtful attitude on behalf of GDR citizens, far removed from the stereotype of the atomised worker. One letter from 1986 repeated the trope seen earlier, whereby memories of war in Germany were linked to contemporary practices of solidarity. A former worker wrote to the *SZ* to note that he was unable to make the paper’s *Solibasar* due to ill health, but that he sent a shawl to be sold there:

I think that the shawl will bring good fortune to the bazaar. The thought of sending it to you came to me yesterday, on the anniversary of the mass murder in Soweto. It is for the murdered children, but also for those who, in future, want to live, simply as humans. Here I think of Nelson Mandela and his brilliant wife, both wise and courageous... The mastermind of all of the murder in Africa—indeed everywhere where murder is found—is the very same who wants to turn outer space into a theatre of war. I have lived almost 79 years, and I can tell you a few things: I starved in the Second World War, and I have shared my meagre amounts of food. I cleared many thousands of bricks, filled the old field trains with debris. But what would happen this time round, no-one would be able to write about. There must

¹²⁵ BStU, MfS BV Dresden, Abteilung XX Nr. 10391, Band 4, “Mit aktiver Solidarität dabei,” undated.

¹²⁶ See examples in BStU, MfS, BV Dresden, Abteilung XX, Nr. 10574, Band 4, “Wir sind dabei beim Solidaritätsscheck,” 264, “Wortmeldung des VEB MLW Kerandents-Werk Radeberg zum Kampf für den Frieden durch unsere Solidarität,” 266, “Tag der Freundschaft in Arnsdorf,” 164, as well as BStU, MfS, BV Dresden, Abteilung XX, Nr. 10574, Band 5, “an alle Jugendbrigaden und Arbeitskollektives des Kreises Dresden,” 36, “Solidaritätsbasar im VEB HAW Radebul,” 44.

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be no war in the cosmos, no nuclear war. Instead let human understanding and trust reign among humans.¹²⁷

Letters such as this clearly betrayed a segment of the GDR population who were *au fait* with contemporary Cold War events and the GDR's official positions in regard to them.

Other letters showed impressive knowledge of global developments but framed them in a much more critical light. In 1981 a reader from Radebul, for example, wrote with a question regarding Cambodia. The reader began by noting their support for the Cambodian liberation struggle: "We, like the whole of peace-loving humanity, were deeply moved by the news regarding these people. What they have achieved in liberating themselves from the monarchical-capitalist yoke is without precedent in the history of humanity." The reader was deeply moved by what had happened in the Pol Pot era, however: "How was it possible for a people to become so physically and psychologically deformed...Why was money, education, culture, social welfare and industry destroyed, and the cities and towns cleared of their population? What were they trying to achieve when they divided families...and with the gruesome murder of between a quarter and a third of the population?" What followed was a direct accusation against the authorities: "Why were we not told of these atrocities during the Pol Pot era? Why was this only done when they were over? Would it not have been better to put this solidarity to use to avoid millions of people being killed? Instead, we did and continue—correctly so—to learn about every example of capitalist oppression."¹²⁸ Unsurprisingly, the letter was not published.

Such independence of thought is surprisingly common throughout the letters. One writer, moved by the 25-year jail sentence received by South African journalist and ANC activist Marion Sparg, wrote to the SZ detailing their attempts to get an address for Sparg via both the Solidarity Committee and, eventually, the ANC office in Berlin. While the

¹²⁷ BStU, MfS, BV Dresden, Abteilung XX, Nr. 10391, Band 4, Letter from 17.6.1986, 106.

¹²⁸ BStU, MfS BV Dresden, Abteilung XX Nr. 10391, Band 1, "Frage und Antworten," 16.7.1981 261.

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writer was successful in obtaining an address, their request that the SZ published the letter in order to publicise the issue—with the reminder that “Angela Davis was also saved in 1973”—was turned down.¹²⁹ Another letter asked for more information about solidarity efforts in Nicaragua, as the writer had a pen pal there and wanted to tell them about what the GDR was doing.¹³⁰ Such examples of independence of thought were not directly discouraged by the editorship or other state authorities, but responses tended to channel impulses for action through to donations to the Solidarity Committee. A reader who wrote in asking what they could do to help the countries that had succumbed in 1986 to the desert locust plague across the Sahel was given a detailed response from the deputy department leader for foreign policy and propaganda at the SZ, outlining the actions taken by the UN Food and Agriculture Organization, of which the GDR was a member. Any extra forms of help on behalf of the GDR would be financed by the solidarity committee, so it was recommended that the reader made a donation.¹³¹ There is evidence that some readers were irked by the attempt to channel solidarity into collective, state-directed paths. One undated postcard chastised the paper for “giving no help for individual activists” and speaking in “casual newspaper German” which limits real “collective thinking,” perhaps conscious of the state’s desire to shape the practice of solidarity away from individualism.¹³²

¹²⁹ BStU, MfS BV Dresden, Abteilung XX, Nr 10391, Band 4, “Letter from 23. November 1986,” 274. On the GDR Angela Davis campaign, see Katrina Hagen, “Ambivalence and Desire in the East German ‘Free Angela Davis Campaign,’” in *Comrades of Color: East Germany in the Cold War World*, ed. Quinn Slobodian (New York: Berghahn Books, 2015).

¹³⁰ BStU, MfS BV Dresden, Abteilung XX Nr. 10391, Band 4, “Solidarität für Nikaragua,” 236.

¹³¹ BStU, MfS BV Dresden, Abteilung XX, Nr. 10391, Band 4, “Letter from 18. August 1986,” p.201 and “Letter from 7. August 1986,” 202.

¹³² BStU, MfS BV Dresden, Abteilung XX Nr. 10391, Band 4, “Sehr geehrte Redaktion der Sächsischen Zeitung,” 98.

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It is important to guard against reading too much into the editing of these letters. Was it meaningful, for example, that a letter from the VEB Bau-Vibriermaschinen Radeburg collective which detailed a solidarity festival in which they raised 300 *Mark* had its title changed from “Active Solidarity - active struggle for freedom” to the solidarity committee slogan “...*Und nie Vergessen die Solidarität!*”¹³³ Was it a sign of overbearing state control that editors frequently changed expressions of solidarity to include the details of the state’s solidarity account?¹³⁴ Or that a different letter from DFD Group 90 in Dresden regarding their *Solidaritätsbasar* had a sentence removed that mentioned the reading and singing of Christmas poems and carols?¹³⁵ Without access to the inner workings of the editorial mind, such examples are difficult to assess. Others, however, seem less ambiguous. A letter from a collective at a dairy farm in Radeburg that outlined its solidarity donations in light of the *SZ*’s “international day of struggle for journalists against imperialism and war” saw over 300 *Mark* donated for what they deemed “the welfare of the people and for the conservation and securing of the politics of peace.” Editors changed the sentence, however, so that it ended instead with the phrase “our party and government’s politics of peace.”¹³⁶ Some letters were almost completely rewritten. One, from the VEB Landtechnischer Anlagenbau Dresden regarding celebrations of the founding of the FDJ in 1983 had roughly 100 words inserted (see Figure Six), from the apparently harmless—the changing of “the youth organisation” to its correct appellation “The Free German Youth”—to the more meaningful; entire

¹³³ BStU, MfS BV Dresden, Abteilung XX, Nr. 10574, Band 4, “Tätige Solidarität - tätiger Kampf für Frieden,” 259.

¹³⁴ BStU, MfS, BV Dresden, Abteilung XX Nr. 10391, Band 4, “Wir sind dabei, wenn es um die Solidarität geht,” 102.

¹³⁵ BStU, MfS, BV Dresden, Abteilung XX Nr. 10391, Band 4, Letter from 11. December 1986.

¹³⁶ BStU, MfS, BV Dresden, Abteilung XX Nr. 10574, Band 4, “Internationaler Kampftag der Journalisten gegen Imperialismus,” 161.

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sentences, such as “and thus the FDJ youth show today’s generation how to take their responsibilities and tasks seriously and how to fulfil them” were introduced.¹³⁷

A letter about a “friendship meeting” in 1986 between Vietnamese students and GDR citizens in Arnsdorf was similarly edited. In among clarifications and grammatical corrections were subtle but telling changes: the sentence “Comrade Wolfgang Müller....[put the event on in order to] turn solidarity into a personal experience” was replaced with “Comrade Wolfgang Müller....[put the event on in order to] strengthen the bonds between us and our friends in the Far East.”¹³⁸ Solidarity was not to be represented as a personal experience. In some cases, the contest over what solidarity “meant” was quite literal. A letter which begun “What does solidarity mean to me? It means a shared identity and mutual obligations with African and Latin American countries” was edited to “Solidarity is shared identity and support for those people who struggle for a better life.”¹³⁹ A better metaphor for the notion of a state-guided and controlled solidarity culture is difficult to imagine; what solidarity meant to GDR citizens was open, but it could not be publicly expressed without being subject to alteration.

This discursive policing was not limited to public and private utterances. Solidarity actions themselves which were carried out without the state’s blessing were usually shut down, and protagonists sometimes prosecuted. GDR citizens who applied to go and work as independent development workers in Tanzania in 1977, for example, were both refused and visited by the local police force.¹⁴⁰ In the mid-1980s an entire Stasi operation was devoted to a group of students at Jena University who had established an initiative entitled “Ambulancia,” which sought to raise money for ambulances in Nicaragua. The

¹³⁷ BStU, MfS, BV Dresden, Abteilung XX, Nr. 10574, Band 2, “Festwoche zum 40. Jahrestag der FDJ würdig abgeschlossen,” 267.

¹³⁸ BStU, MfS, BV Dresden, Abteilung XX, Nr. 10574, Band 4, “Tag der Freundschaft in Arnsdorf,” 164.

¹³⁹ BStU, MfS, BV Dresden, Abteilung XX Nr. 10574, Band 5, undated letter, 32.

¹⁴⁰ “DDR: Zuviel Herz,” *Der Spiegel*, September 26, 1977, <http://www.spiegel.de/spiegel/print/d-40736460.html>.

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Stasi described the initiative as “an oppositional solidarity action for Nicaragua, with which they intend to reach other students at the University of Jena.”¹⁴¹ In this particular case the state’s paranoia proved justified and the group did indeed use solidarity as a cover to produce samizdat literature critical of the GDR’s state structures.¹⁴² Indeed, as the GDR came to an end, solidarity was increasingly refashioned as a term of resistance to state socialism, just as it was in Poland. This trend was particularly clear among church groups: the *Arbeitskreis solidarische Kirche*, or “solidarity church working group,” which was founded in Wittenberg in the mid-1980s became one of the GDR’s most important opposition groups.¹⁴³ Given the term’s ubiquity, it is perhaps unsurprising that after the *Wende*, 67 percent of former GDR citizens said they found solidarity to be missing from the new unified Germany.¹⁴⁴

Conclusion

To what extent were solidarity donations enforced upon the GDR population, as opposed to being the product of a popular desire? The archives provide evidence of both: from FDGB assessments of the increasing “internationalist consciousness” of GDR workers to the more convincing testaments of internationalist solidarity sent into the *Sächsische Zeitung*, to the acts of resistance recorded by the Stasi and trade union booklets with empty solidarity donation columns. Wherever one looks, the individual motives for charitable giving are complex, multivariate, and contested, even when viewed

¹⁴¹ BStU, MfS HA XX-AKG, Nr. 2220, “den Stand der weiteren Entwicklung des sogenannten Nikaraguakreises Ambulancia,” 28.

¹⁴² Katharina Lenski, *Geheime Kommunikationsräume?: Die Staatssicherheit an der Friedrich-Schiller-Universität Jena* (Berlin: Campus Verlag, 2017), 480–83.

¹⁴³ Ehrhart Neubert, *Geschichte der Opposition in der DDR 1949-1989* (Berlin: Ch. Links Verlag, 1998), 620.

¹⁴⁴ Katja Neller, *DDR-Nostalgie: Dimensionen der Orientierungen der Ostdeutschen gegenüber der ehemaligen DDR, ihre Ursachen und politischen Konnotationen* (Berlin: Springer-Verlag, 2006), 184.

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within contemporary societies.¹⁴⁵ What, then—following the Foucauldian theme—can be said?

The first contention of this chapter as it relates to the wider thesis involves taking a closer look at the notion that the GDR's support for the proto-socialist world was driven by a desire for legitimacy. The evidence presented here suggests that if legitimacy was the intended end, then the means were misplaced; GDR citizens were not only fed feel-good stories about the development of the proto-socialist world, but were supposed to *Mach mit*, funding solidarity initiatives with their own money, gifting their own possessions, and working overtime to help contribute to the realisation of a socialist world. In many ways, the existence of solidarity culture appears incompatible with legitimising purposes. If the state needed to raise funds to donate to the proto-socialist world, there were surely less conflictual methods of doing so than asking citizens for public donations. Solidarity donations could have been extracted as union dues were; with set amounts and little fanfare. Instead the FDGB devoted a huge amount of effort to attempting to raise donations through the raising of socialist consciousness, suggesting a more complex practice than legitimacy-based explanations could account for. There would have been huge amounts of pressure to donate. But the open-ended nature of the donations allowed for a variety of responses, from open resistance, to tacit acceptance and popular enthusiasm.

The GDR may have been a “walled-in” state in many important ways, but the physical limitations placed on movement sat paradoxically alongside an openness that saw the proto-socialist world feature as a prominent aspect of everyday life. Solidarity collections for national liberation movements were an accepted part of normal life in the workplace, as were solidarity bazaars, petitions, marches and meetings. GDR citizens wrote letters

¹⁴⁵ See the number of potential reasons for giving listed in Mark Ottoni-Wilhelm, “Altruism and Egoism/Warm Glow in Economics and Psychology:: Building a Bridge Between Different Experimental Approaches,” in *Social Economics*, ed. Joan Costa-Font and Mario Macis, Current and Emerging Avenues (Boston: MIT Press, 2017), 79.

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to newspapers about revolutionary developments in far-flung areas of the world such as Namibia, debated the development of different forms of Marxism in south-east Asia on the factory floor, and shopped for groceries watched over by portraits of obscure African Marxists. They also mocked the state's attempts to encourage their solidarity, sometimes resisted them outright, and sometimes questioned its tenets. Just as alliances with decolonising states in the proto-socialist world and the educating of African trade unionists could help to break the GDR's isolation in Europe, the practice of solidarity donations served an economic function within the GDR and at the same time strengthened its international position. The importance of the proto-socialist world made this practice ubiquitous, and, in turn, this ubiquity meant that it could not but become a terrain of social struggle and political contestation between citizen and state.

Chapter Four - Traversing the Socialist Archipelago: GDR Cruises to Cuba, 1961-1989

The archipelago was open to him, the Socialist Union, a continent of unexpected richness that people ‘over there’ [in the West], arrogant and fixated upon the Atlantic, had absolutely no idea about... the Crimea, the Adriatic islands off Yugoslavia, Cuba, Vietnam, China, the stupefying Orient of the Soviet Union...Dushanbe is wonderful; on the Silk road you could sense the very breadth of human history, there awaits Bukhara, Samarkand...‘You could have it all so easy, my dear child, if only you wanted!’

Uwe Tellkamp, *Der Turm*¹

It is a shame that we are not neighbours.

Fidel Castro to Erich Honecker, Havana, 1980²

Introduction

¹ This quote is taken from Uwe Tellkamp’s influential semi-autobiographical post-Wende novel, *The Tower*, in which a committed party member questions why one of the key characters, Meno, refused to explore the archipelago. Uwe Tellkamp, *Der Turm: Geschichte aus einem versunkenen Land* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2008), 749–50.

² SAPMO-BArch, DY 30/2460, “Stenografische Niederschrift der offiziellen Gespräche des Erich Honecker und Fidel Castro Ruz,” 83.

For most GDR citizens the turn to the proto-socialist world was largely ideational and symbolic.³ Although, as we have seen in the previous chapter, the imagery and practices of socialist internationalism were ubiquitous, the project rarely involved actual interaction with the subjects of the proto-socialist world or travel to it. A number of exceptions to this rule did exist: numerous so called “travel cadres,” or *Reisekader*, who travelled and worked across the globe on official state business,⁴ or the FDJ “friendship brigades” who travelled to the proto-socialist world to carry out development projects.⁵ For citizens faced with the GDR’s tight travel restrictions, such chances to work abroad were likely viewed as valuable opportunities for foreign travel—indeed, in the literature and popular memory—these practices are often framed as the *only* way for GDR citizens to travel beyond the Eastern bloc. To quote one recent oral history of the GDR: “Germans living in....[the] GDR were literally walled in and were only allowed to travel to other communist countries within the Eastern bloc such as Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Hungary.”⁶ Although these trips did make up the overwhelming majority of foreign visits made by GDR citizens, this claim is not strictly true. Heike Wolter has estimated that the number of holidays made from the GDR to fellow socialist republics in Cuba, Vietnam, North Korea and Mongolia numbered 27,000 in 1970, rising to 74,000 by 1989. These figures represented almost six percent of all foreign travel in the GDR in 1970, falling to just below three percent in 1988/89.⁷

³ This chapter is an amended version of the article “It is a Shame we are not Neighbours’: GDR Tourist Cruises to Cuba, 1961-1989,” which has been accepted for publication by the *Journal of Contemporary History* (expected 2020).

⁴ On this group, see Jens Niederhut, *Die Reisekader: Auswahl und Disziplinierung einer privilegierten Minderheit in der DDR* (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2005).

⁵ On the brigades’ work, see Hubertus Büschel, *Hilfe zur Selbsthilfe: Deutsche Entwicklungsarbeit in Afrika 1960-1975* (Frankfurt: Campus Verlag, 2014).

⁶ Hester Vaizey, *Born in the GDR: Living in the Shadow of the Wall* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 5.

⁷ The numbers of total tourists are 1,247,027 and 2,548,532 respectively Heike Wolter, *“Ich harre aus im Land und geh, ihm fremd”: Die Geschichte des Tourismus in der DDR* (Campus Verlag, 2009), 147.

Of all of the destinations in the extra-European world, Cuba was the most important, both statistically and symbolically. Between the years 1961 and 1984, roughly 10,000 citizens of the GDR would travel to Cuba on the FDGB-owned MS *Völkerfreundschaft* (people's friendship), and thousands more between 1984 and 1989 on its replacement, the MS *Arkona*. In these years the revolutionary politics of the Cuban state would transform from a socialist-influenced nationalism to a fully-fledged Marxism-Leninism, culminating with COMECON membership in 1972. In the schema of socialist development stages it was, alongside Vietnam and Mongolia, one of the few proto-socialist states which actually delivered on the promise of objective anti-imperialism. But its role in the socialist world system indicated the hierarchical, stage-driven model of socialist development, and Cuba was always imagined by GDR officials as being behind the European states on the developmentalist path. Despite being probably the most successful example of the possibility of socialism developing in the extra-European world, Cuba was consistently represented as fundamentally different from other socialist states in a manner that belied theorist's claims for convergence between them.

Cuba's revolution surprised the socialist world. For most of the early 1960s Cuba remained a nation of "socialist orientation," still building socialism just as the GDR's socialism entered its "mature phase." The contradictions in the ideology of the GDR's orientation to the proto-socialist world were laid bare by Cuba's development, and while these states were viewed as objectively destined to gravitate toward socialism and thus societal convergence, the attitudes displayed by European leaders of the socialist project were typified by notions of deeply ingrained cultural difference between the North and the South. This chapter uses the cruises to Cuba to argue that instead of autarchy, a distinctive vision of socialist globalization was developed in the GDR. This vision imagined the state as forming a component part of a constantly expanding worldwide archipelago of socialist and proto-socialist nation, and as we will see, Cuba played an important role within this constellation, both as a site of exoticism and of revolutionary allure.

The notion of the “socialist world system” was tied, from the beginning, to a vision of convergence between socialist nations. In the GDR the concept of *Heimat* was extended—using Marxist-Leninist accounts of social relations—to include the state’s socialist allies such as Cuba. Paradoxically, however, Cuba was also imagined as a site of radical difference. GDR authorities, often in competition with one another, used Cuba as both a means of providing “exotic” holidays *and* as evidence of the growth of a growing, socially converging socialist world, simultaneously othering Cuba while attempting to present it as objectively analogous to the GDR. As time went on the contradiction between convergence and difference shifted in emphasis toward the latter, moving from a utopian ideal of transnational proletarian convergence in the 1960s to the less imaginative reality of “exotic” travel in the 1980s. The geopolitics of the Cold War meant that travelling between socialist nations on different sides of the planet was always fraught with risk: as Fidel Castro acknowledged to Erich Honecker when discussing tourism in 1980, “it is a shame that we are not neighbours.”⁸ Over time, however, the respective isolation of the two states came into sharper focus. GDR tourists who travelled to Cuba in the 1960s were imagined as harbingers of a growing socialist world, but as this world failed to grow it began to resemble an archipelago of connected, but increasingly isolated islands.

This chapter will begin by elucidating how the cruises functioned within the ideological construction of the “socialist world system.” It will then expand upon Cuba’s specific role within this idea; next, it will explain how different institutions in the GDR produced different, sometimes contradictory ideas about Cuba in the 1960s and 1970s; following this, it will show how security concerns regarding the trips took increasing prominence over time, as the “socialist world system” transformed from a growing force into a solidified archipelago; in conclusion it will make the case for understanding the cruises as part of a broader reassessment of global ideas in the GDR.

⁸ SAPMO-BArch, DY 30/2460, “Stenografische Niederschrift der offiziellen Gespräche des Erich Honecker und Fidel Castro Ruz,” 83.

Tourism in the Socialist World System

Until now there has been no dedicated study of GDR tourism to Cuba. Neither of the two specific histories of tourism in the GDR deal with the subject in any great detail.⁹ Andreas Stirn's mammoth history of GDR cruise liners makes several reference to Cuban cruises, without devoting any attention to them as a separate object of study.¹⁰ In her study on Cuba in the GDR imaginary, Jennifer Ruth Hosek only fleetingly mentions the actual process of travel, suggesting it was rare enough not to warrant sufficient attention.¹¹ This lacuna is closely related to the persistent myth that GDR citizens could only travel in the Eastern bloc. While the symbolism of tourism to Cuba was more important than its actual statistical impact, it is revealing to compare the GDR to Western European trends in this regard. Only a fraction of GDR holidays were taken outside Europe. This was, however, part of a broader global pattern: in 1989, the proportion of West European holidays taken outside Europe was seven percent.¹² In terms of trajectory, however, the GDR bucked international trends. Holidays abroad as a percentage of overall trips actually *declined* throughout the 1970s, as the rate of foreign holidays remained stable while domestic holidays increased.¹³ Domestic holidaying eventually came to take up what Gerlinde Imscher has described as an "excess of

⁹ Wolter, *Ich harre aus im Land und geh, ihm fremd*; Christopher Görlich, *Urlaub vom Staat : Tourismus in der DDR*. (Köln Böhlau Verlag, 2012).

¹⁰ Andreas Stirn, *Traumschiffe des Sozialismus: Die Geschichte der DDR-Urlauberschiffe 1953-1990* (Berlin: Metropol Verlag, 2010).

¹¹ Jennifer Ruth Hosek, *Sun, Sex, and Socialism: Cuba in the German Imaginary* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012), 25.

¹² Peter Roth, "Travelflows in Europe: A Statistical Summary," in *Tourism in Europe: Structures and Developments*, ed. Wilhelm Englbert Pompl and Patrick Lavery (Wallingford: CAB International, 1993), 120.

¹³ BAArch, DM 1/10491, Band 1, "Ergebnisse einer Bevölkerungsbefragung zum Freizeittourismus im Jahr 1977," 1-3

weight” [Übergewicht] in the East German travel offer.¹⁴ As Hasso Spode notes, the amount of GDR tourists travelling abroad by the late 1980s lagged far behind comparative numbers in the FRG, although it corresponded similarly to those in France.¹⁵ As a destination for GDR citizens Cuba probably never represented more than 5 percent of all outgoing journeys.

The extensive efforts to which the East German state went to avoid *Republikflucht* (literally “desertion of the republic,” a state crime from 1957) has contributed to an image of the GDR in both academic and popular literature as parochial, insular, and restrictive. In contrast, these trips were globally ambitious, expensive, complex practically and a large source of *Republikflucht*: 233 GDR citizens escaped from cruises during the ships’ almost 30-year operational existence.¹⁶ Why did a state that had gone to such great lengths to “wall in” its citizens allow thousands of them to traverse its boundaries at such great risk and financial cost? Tourism to Cuba had a symbolic significance that went far beyond the thousands who travelled there every year from the GDR. The Caribbean island was an important example of how GDR citizens experienced the world outside of their nation’s borders, both in reality and in image. As the growth in recent scholarship on socialist tourism has shown, tourism was an important arena within the attempt to forge “the new socialist human,” and included the creation of a new “proletarian spatial imaginary.”¹⁷ For the GDR, which inherited what Gerlinde Irscher has described as range of holiday destinations “without any real

¹⁴ Gerlinde Irscher, “Geschichte der ostdeutschen Kulturwissenschaft,” *Kulturation: Online Journal für Kultur, Wissenschaft und Politik* 42 [17], no. 22 (2019): 47.

¹⁵ Hasso Spode, “Tourismus in der Gesellschaft der DDR. Eine vergleichende Einführung,” in *Goldstrand und Teutonengrill: Kultur- und Sozialgeschichte des Tourismus in Deutschland 1945 bis 1989*, ed. Hasso Spode (Berlin: Moser, Verlag für Universitäre Kommunikation, 1996), 14.

¹⁶ This figure includes escapees from journeys to other locations such as the USSR, Egypt, the Black Sea, or Greece. Stirn, *Traumschiffe des Sozialismus*, 779.

¹⁷ See key text by Diane Koenker: Diane P. Koenker, *Club Red: Vacation Travel and the Soviet Dream* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2013); The reference to the spatial imaginary can be found in Anne E. Gorsuch, *All This Is Your World: Soviet Tourism at Home and Abroad after Stalin* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 52

highlights,” this new imaginary was particularly important.¹⁸ As Christopher Görlich has argued, the leadership of the GDR attempted to shift citizens’ “mental maps” towards a new cartographical imagination which looked beyond Western Europe for holiday destinations.¹⁹ This attempt was deeply bound up with the global ideas of Marxism-Leninism. Tourism between socialist countries was not just conceived of as a subjective product of friendship between nations, but also as an objective process in which the people of similarly-structured socialist societies would increasingly cohere. The growth of overseas tourism was ideologically tied to a global conception of shared sovereignty, whereby the different individual member states of the “socialist world system” were theorised as being on a path toward a post-national, unified humanity, even states as apparently disparate as Cuba and the GDR.

Much of the work taken up by the scholars who have contributed to a growing literature on socialist tourism in the past decade has been devoted to evaluating how distinct state socialist tourism was from its capitalist counterpart. Leisure travel bore distinct differences across the Iron Curtain, despite being a manifestation of the consumer society which transcended Cold War divisions in the latter half of the twentieth century.²⁰ The most notable of these differences was the explicitly political claim the state made upon areas such as leisure in socialist society. This claim involved means and ends: tourism was supposed to serve the immediate needs of workers, reproducing—through rest and relaxation—the labour power socialist states would need to overcome their capitalist counterparts. It was also to encourage and reward those who

¹⁸ Irmscher, “Geschichte der ostdeutschen Kulturwissenschaft,” 9.

¹⁹ Christopher Görlich, “Wohin werden Sie sich im nächsten Sommer wenden?’ Zur DDR-Reisezeitschrift ‘Unterwegs’ 1957-1962,” in *Die DDR in Europa - zwischen Isolation und Öffnung*, ed. Heiner Timmermann (Münster: LIT, 2005), 524.

²⁰ On this tension, see Anne E. Gorsuch and Diane Koenker, “Introduction,” in *Turizm: The Russian and East European Tourist Under Capitalism and Socialism*, ed. Anne E. Gorsuch and Diane Koenker (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006); For a broad survey of the literature on socialist leisure travel, see: Adam T. Rosenbaum, “Leisure Travel and Real Existing Socialism: New Research on Tourism in the Soviet Union and Communist Eastern Europe,” *Journal of Tourism History* 7, no. 1-2 (May 4, 2015): 157-76.

over-fulfilled quotas. The FDGB thus played a key role the provision of tourism in the GDR.²¹ Higher productivity was not an end in and of itself, but rather a means to a different end: the global victory of socialism. For communists this global victory would involve a fundamental reordering of social relations, and thus human beings. Tourism, then, was an important arena for the shaping of the “new socialist human”: it was, in short, supposed to change people. As it did so it would bring together the peoples of different socialist nations. As an evaluation of tourism between the socialist nations produced in 1985 for the federal board of the FDGB would claim: “Through this tradition [trade union tourism], union members familiarise themselves with one another, and the process of socialist economic integration and the integration [Zusammenwachsen] of the socialist nations is furthered.”²²

Cruising the socialist world system was a mix of luxury and politics (see Figure One). The Swedish-built, FDGB-owned MS *Völkerfreundschaft* had gone into operation in 1960;²³ at the time GDR officials claimed it was the world’s largest operating cruise liner.²⁴ On board, travellers could drink *Cuba Libre* (with Cuban rum and GDR-produced *Vita Cola*), attend bingo nights, dances, and film screenings, and morning exercise classes were held on deck.²⁵ Alongside these events there were also lectures

²¹ This was both a continuation of a long German tradition of trade union holiday provision, and also a break: once fully entrenched within the structures of the state, the FDGB was in large part responsible for the tying of leisure to productivity and took up a key role in welfare provision. On this role, see Schaufuss, *Die politische Rolle des FDGB-Feriedienstes in der DDR*.

²² SAPMO-BArch, DY 34/25530, “Stand und Erfordernisse des Auslandstourismus des Feriedienstes des FDGB und der Betriebe,” 5.

²³ Memories of the ship are subtly pervasive in contemporary Germany. The Mitteldeutscher Rundfunk TV station has carried various features on it. See mdr.de, “Traumschiffe für die ‘werkstätige Bevölkerung’: MS *Völkerfreundschaft* | MDR.DE,” accessed March 19, 2019, <https://www.mdr.de/zeitreise/ddr-seefahrt-schiff-ahoi-zur-see-traumschiff-ms-voelkerfreundschaft100.html> A now-closed bar in Berlin’s Prenzlauer Berg district was named after the ship: see <https://www.berlin.de/bars/adressen/kneipe/ms-voelkerfreundschaft-0d1ab041fbac2cc0a7f4503ac9755787.html>.

²⁴ Störn, *Traumschiffe des Sozialismus*, 97.

²⁵ See copy of the on-board magazine, *Bord Tribüne*, in SAPMO-BArch, DY 34/616.

given by political officers and Spanish civil war veterans.²⁶ The mix of leisure and politics was not seen as contradictory by GDR officials, but there were complaints regarding lack of attendance of the political lectures, and trade union functionaries repeatedly stressed that more effort should be put into refining “cultural life” on board. In the 1960s, the ships would also deliver the physical manifestations of GDR solidarity; one ship, for example, took 2,500 “protest resolutions” against US intervention that had been written in GDR factories.²⁷ On the return leg of the first journey, ten wounded Cuban soldiers travelled back to the GDR for treatment.²⁸

What was the end goal? The ships were intended to serve various functions: originally dreamt up as a response to the 1953 uprisings by FDGB chief Herbert Warnke, they were conceived of as prestige objects, that would “act as visible evidence of the superiority of socialism over capitalism,” as one report to Stasi chief Erich Mielke put it in 1959.²⁹ For the FDGB a key focus was boosting productivity, both before the journeys and after; the FDGB holidays were conceived of as *Auszeichnungsreise*, or “award trips.” The central FDGB board would distribute the trips down to individual brigades which had performed well, and the holidays would then be allocated to the outstanding workers within that brigade. The FDGB hoped the trips would spur workers to work harder and that those who travelled would return home as more motivated, committed socialists.³⁰

The cruises would also serve the growth of a unified socialist world system. Repeated *ad finitum* was the statement that socialist tourism was carried out “auf der Grundlage

²⁶ SAPMO-BArch, DY 34/24687, “Einschätzung und Ergebnisse der bisherigen Schiffsreisen,” 2.

²⁷ SAPMO-BArch, DY 34/2340, Letter from Florin to Meier, 14.11.1962, 1.

²⁸ SAPMO-BArch, NY 4421/38, “Bericht über die Reise des FDGB-Urlauberschiffes nach Kuba von 1.11.61-1.12.61,” 5.

²⁹ BStU MfS, BV Rst Leiter der BV Nr. 97, Teil 2, “Betrifft: FDGB Urlauberschiff „MS Völkerfreundschaft“,” 314. On the link to the 1953 uprising, see: Stirn, *Traumschiffe des Sozialismus*, 40

³⁰ SAPMO-BArch, DY 34/24687, “Einschätzung der Erfahrungen auf der 1. Reise des FDGB-Urlauberschiffes Völkerfreundschaft,” 2.

sozialistischer Produktionsverhältnisse”: “On the basis of socialist conditions of production.”³¹ Because Marxist-Leninists believed that the relations of production determine economics and social consciousness, it was seen that each society in which these conditions reign would naturally converge.³² By the mid-1970s GDR theorist Günther Lange could speak of this convergence in terms that would not be unfamiliar to a reader of Western social science globalisation literature in the 1990s: “Our world becomes bigger every day...As we exchange goods, we tie the relationship between spatially distant producers ever closer. The intensity of this relationship grows with the transition to economic cooperation and integration.... The borders between socialist nations lose their earlier blocking function, so that tourism develops on an increasingly wider basis.”³³ As we will see, nationalism retained a prominent, if theoretically temporary, space within this ideal of socialist integration. While nations remained sovereign, the individual components of a broader whole, they nevertheless became increasingly less “foreign.” According to Lange: “The foreign reveals itself to us as a specific form within the broad content of corresponding socialist conditions. It thus increasingly loses its alien appearance and leads to a wider “native” [*heimatlichen*] region.”³⁴ This extension of *Heimat* across time and space has largely been ignored by scholars who have worked on the GDR’s deployment of the concept.³⁵

³¹ For an example, see Reisebüro der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik, *20 Jahre Reisebüro der DDR* (Berlin: Ost, 1978), 9.

³² Rochus Door and Winfred Reschke, *Das sozialistische Weltsystem: Herausbildung, Festigung, Weiterentwicklung* (Berlin: Verlag der Wissenschaften, 1975), 16.

³³ Günther Lange, *Heimat - Realität und Aufgabe: zur marxistischen Auffassung des Heimatbegriffs* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1975), 120.

³⁴ *ibid.*, 122.

³⁵ Jan Palmowski’s groundbreaking study on East German *heimat*, for example, only covers its domestic usage. Jan Palmowski, *Inventing a Socialist Nation: Heimat and the Politics of Everyday Life in the GDR, 1945-90* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013); Jennifer Ruth Hosek has criticised this limitation. For Hosek, the national *heimat* was “refracted through the extra-national in popular discourse” and thus “was to become more desirable at home.” While Hosek is correct to point toward the outward manifestations of *heimisch* discourse, she ignores the truly global core of the theory of the socialist world system: for Hosek, “extended *Heimat*” remains a project that is, in the final analysis, one committed to reinforcing domestic legitimacy instead of a truly global vision. Hosek, *Sun, Sex, and Socialism*, 55-90.

While GDR theorists may have seen global convergence, this convergence stemmed from the societal conditions of individual socialist countries and was extended only to countries belonging to the socialist world system. As a report written in 1976 for the GDR's Institute of International Relations claimed, convergence between socialist states was an objective process, as well as being one that is "consciously shaped...Convergence [Annäherung] finds its expression in the blossoming of each socialist nation, and the strengthening of their sovereignty...[it] leads to the emergence of elements of collectivity in their politics, economies, and social lives." While this was a process that took place largely at the state level, it was also reflected in the "internationalization of experience" of individual workers in each socialist state with the socialist world system.³⁶ The system itself was a transitional object; according to a text published by GDR academics in 1975, it was exponentially growing as countries "dropped out" of the capitalist world system, but this was a slow and painstaking process which proceeded in stages.³⁷ Tourism's role in this convergence was organised through the Conference of the State Organs of Tourism of the Socialist States, which met annually and included all of the member states of COMECON.

Before the building of the Berlin Wall in August 1961, non-socialist tourist destinations were cautiously included in depictions of mobility. The late 1950s and early 1960s were a period of confidence for the socialist regimes, when the *Völkerfreundschaft* was originally purchased it was envisaged that it would travel to capitalist countries in order to "demonstrate the superiority of socialism over

³⁶ DASR IIB, 13211, "Problemstellungen für die Diskussion im Wissenschaftlichen Rat des IIB am 29.9.1976," 2-4.

³⁷ The first stage began with the Soviet revolution of October 1917. The second, which spanned the end of the Second World War to the end of the 1950s, saw the establishment of socialist conditions of production and the countries of the Warsaw Pact plus Albania, Yugoslavia, North Korea, China and Vietnam joined the system. Cuba was thus the only country to have joined the system in its third stage when it was declared a dictatorship of the proletariat at the beginning of the 1960s. It would also be the last. Door and Reschke, *Das sozialistische Weltsystem*, 31-32.

capitalism.”³⁸ Imagery produced regarding tourism to capitalist countries thus often depicted them as proto-socialist, or emphasised their socialist credentials. A FDGB picture book produced before the building of the wall, for example, featured photos of GDR citizens on holiday in Egypt and Greece. An East German tourist on a camel in front of the pyramids was captioned “5000 years ago slaves built the pyramids. Today workers, freed from exploitation, stand before these historic structures.” The Acropolis, according to the book, reminds one of not only the ancient past of Greece, but also “the site of the heroic deed of Greek patriot Manolis Glezos, who tore down the flag of fascist oppressors and replaced it with the Greek flag.”³⁹

Cuba in the GDR Imaginary

A resolution drafted on the exchange of tourists between the GDR and Cuba in 1964 had noted that “increasing circles of the population wish for holidays in the tropical areas during the climatically unfavourable periods.”⁴⁰ Within the socialist world system, then, Cuba bore singular qualities that combined revolutionary and hedonistic allure with winter sun. As early as 1963 the *Berliner Zeitung* listed Cuba as a potential destination for GDR citizens looking to escape the winter weather.⁴¹ While mass tourism to southern Europe grew rapidly for FRG citizens during the 1960s, the draw of Mediterranean beaches could not be fulfilled for those from the GDR. Travel to Yugoslavia was possible, but difficult due to its non-aligned status. Either the East German Baltic coast, or Romania or Bulgaria became the principal beach holiday destinations, and although travel to these destinations grew significantly from the 1970s

³⁸ BStU, MfS BV Rostock KS 14-63, Band 2, “FDGB Urlauberschiff MS „Völkerfreundschaft“,” 176.

³⁹ FDGB Bundesvorstand, *Frohe Urlaubstage auf hoher See* (Berlin-Treptow: Tribüne, 1961).

⁴⁰ BStU, MfS, SdM 1072, “Beschluss über den Touristenaustausch zwischen der DDR und der Republik Kuba,” 15.

⁴¹ “Winterwetter lockt zum Reisen,” *Berliner Zeitung*, 13th January, 1963, 7.

onwards, opinion research carried out by the SED—particularly the biannual study carried out by the GDR Institute for Market Research—consistently showed that citizens wanted more beach holidays, more holidays abroad, and more winter holidays.⁴²

Although both the GDR's youth organisation's tourist agency *Jugendtourist* and the state travel office, the *Reisebüro*, offered trips to Cuba in addition to the cruises, tourist numbers never reached the level required completely to fulfil citizen's needs for warm winter beach holidays abroad. The distance and geopolitical difficulties of transporting people there would mean that Cuba would never be a destination of mass tourism, its importance was as much symbolic as it was related to actual travel. As a former playground of US millionaires, Cuba had qualities the other distant nodes of the socialist world system, Mongolia, North Korea, or Vietnam, did not. Travel material would frequently reference this transformation, with one travel guide describing Varadero Beach as "once a resort for millionaires, today a resort for workers." (see Figure Two)⁴³ In emphasising this shift, GDR authorities were taking their lead from the Cubans. In 1959 the revolutionary government had transferred many of the estates of exiled Batista-era politicians into the hands of a newly formed tourism bureau, which opened them up for domestic and socialist tourism.⁴⁴

As Anne Gorsuch has shown, Cuba's revolution—which began in relative obscurity but came to prominence in the socialist world as Fidel Castro, having won power in 1959, steered the revolution toward Marxism-Leninism—had come to represent a

⁴² See, for example, a summary of the first three tourism studies: SAPMO-BArch, DM 1/10491, "Schwerpunktmäßige Auswertung der Ergebnisse der 3. Wiederholungsbefragung des Instituts für Marktforschung Leipzig zum Konsumtionsverhalten der DDR-Bevölkerung - unter besonderer Berücksichtigung des Auslandsterritoriums," 4-23, or the 1977 study, SAPMO-BArch, DM 1/10491, "Institut für Marktforschung - Ergebnisse einer Bevölkerungsbefragung zum Freizeittourismus im Jahr 1977."

⁴³ BtSU, MfS, HA VIII, 1021, "Kuba," 49.

⁴⁴ Lillian Guerra, *Visions of Power in Cuba Revolution, Redemption, and Resistance, 1959-1971* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 57.

cocktail of “the romantically heroic, the ideologically appropriate, and the mysteriously exotic” to socialist leaders concerned about a loss of revolutionary zeal in the 1960s.⁴⁵ While Fidel Castro and Che Guevara became genuinely popular anti-imperialist heroes who were seen to breathe life into a global socialist project that was feared to have lost its vigour, older, colonial tropes of Cuba were adopted which presented it as a site of both consumerist and sexual pleasure, often drawing upon a racialised exoticisation of the Cuban body. As Jennifer Ruth Hosek has shown, this mix became an important component of the GDR’s global imagery.⁴⁶ As a member of the socialist world system, Cuba had developed similar societal structures and conditions of production to the GDR, but it remained a site of radical difference; it was thus championed, paradoxically, as both intimately socialist and disarmingly foreign.

These two poles were evidently in tension in the case of GDR citizens travelling to Cuba. While there existed a respect and fascination for the historic achievements of Cuba’s revolution, this was not accompanied with a clean break from the colonial imagery of Cuba that predated the revolution. The prevalence of these images and their reincorporation into new revolutionary narratives, for example, was seen in the 1964 Soviet-Cuban film *Soy Cuba*, which used sexualised imagery of mixed-race and black Cuban women but repackaged it as a critique of pre-revolutionary forms of capitalist exploitation.⁴⁷ This political imaginary is encapsulated in a reading-list distributed to trade union members before they travelled to Cuba in 1985.⁴⁸ The heroic, masculine and revolutionary element of this image was provided by an illustrated history of the Cuban revolution by Lieselotte Kramer-Kaske, mainly featuring photos of male fighters

⁴⁵ Anne E. Gorsuch, “‘Cuba, My Love’: The Romance of Revolutionary Cuba in the Soviet Sixties,” *The American Historical Review* 120, no. 2 (April 1, 2015): 497–526.

⁴⁶ Hosek, *Sun, Sex, and Socialism*.

⁴⁷ Enrique García, *Cuban Cinema After the Cold War: A Critical Analysis of Selected Films* (Jefferson: McFarland, 2015), 105.

⁴⁸ SAPMO-BArch, DY 34/13678, “Mit dem MS Arkona auf Kuba Kurs,” 29.

and descriptions of guerrilla tactics and post-revolutionary achievements.⁴⁹ A historical account of Cuba's path to revolution was provided in Marxist terms by Soviet historian Ėmilija Andreevna Grinevič, focusing particularly on post-revolutionary land reforms.⁵⁰ In stark contrast to this was the journalist Hans-Gert Schubert's travelogue *Rote Insel im Atlantik*, which mixed interviews with former guerrillas with depictions of Cuban women presented as fetishised objects of mystery and desire. In the opening pages Schubert describes an interaction with a Cuban woman "Nancy"; "Considering this was my first day, I only had 'uno, dos, tres...and 'guapa muchacha'—pretty girl—on the tongue, as well, of course, as a handful of political vocabulary. But no girl was to be conquered alone with 'Viva Fidel!' and 'Viva la Amistad!' Not on this evening. So, I let my eyes speak for me and used the rhythm of the music to express my wishes."⁵¹ The book is interspersed with photos of Cuba apparently taken by Schubert, often featuring Cuban women accompanied with subtitles such as "the finest sight in Havana."

The final two books in the collection took Tamara Bunke as their subject material. Bunke's short and eventful life could be lifted from the pages of a Cold War thriller: born in Argentina to exiled German communists in 1937, her family returned to Europe to settle in the GDR, living in the newly-built city of Stalinstadt (now Eisenhüttenstadt). Fluent in Spanish, Bunke worked in various international roles, and ended up working as a spy in Western Europe for a period before travelling to Cuba. She eventually ended up fighting alongside Che Guevara in the Bolivian insurgency, and died there shortly before him in 1967. Bunke became a martyr, her story providing a useful political link between the GDR and Cuba and other national liberation movements. In contrast to

⁴⁹ Liselotte Kramer-Kaske, *Die kubanische Volksrevolution : 1953-1962* (Berlin: Deutscher Verlag der Wissenschaften, 1980).

⁵⁰ Ėmilija Andreevna Grinevič, *Morgenröte über der Karibik : Kubas Weg zur Revolution*, trans. Leon Nebenzahl (Berlin: Verlag Neues Leben, 1978).

⁵¹ Hans-Gert Schubert, *Rote Insel im Atlantik: unterwegs zwischen Havanna und Santiago de Cuba* (Berlin: Verlag Neues Leben, 1979).

the staid leadership of the GDR she was an active, cosmopolitan, fundamentally internationalist figure.

All of these features – the revolutionary heroism, the Marxist conception of history, the “exotic” appeal of Cuba, the intimations of Cuba as a site of male sexual conquest, and the importance of the GDR as a partner in mutual assistance as characterised by Bunke were jumbled together in the tourist material produced by GDR authors and state authorities about the Caribbean island. This image was contradictory in that it saw Cuba as both radically different, the object of exoticisation, *and* objectively analogous, as a member of the socialist world system which was bound together by similarity of social structure and a romantic revolutionary narrative. In one example, from an undated guide that probably appeared in the late 1960s, Cubans were exotic objects, their lives fundamentally different by virtue of being *southern*: “On land you will see, *the colourful, quick-living southern life...[and] tropical splendour...* above all the people, these loving, brave and unyielding creators, heroes, and beneficiaries of the revolution, which they call ‘the giving’ (*die Spendende*). They are, of a special beauty, each one of a kind. The elderly, the visages of whom the deprivation of the past has cut deeply into, the nice girls with their big dark eyes and countless children. They have all the skin colours, from the deep brown of the negroes to the white of the Spaniards. They live, work, and dance together.”⁵²

On the other hand, Cuba was, as a member of the socialist world system, a country going through the “building of the basis of socialism,” a stage that the GDR, according to its self-defined historicization, had recently exited in the early 1960s. The guides pointed out that Cuba’s supposedly objective structures of governance were identical to the GDR: the working class held power, exercised through a dictatorship of the

⁵² My emphasis. BStU, MfS HA VIII, 1021, “Kuba,” p.20. I have consulted several Cuban specialists seeking to find a Spanish translation of *die Spendende*, which is a rarely used noun in German, and none were aware of a comparable term. It may have been simply invented by the author, or a mistranslation of a Spanish word that implied a contribution *to* the revolution, such as *La emulación* or *Los entregados*. I am grateful to Professor Lillian Guerra, Carlos Hawthorn and Gloria Carnevali for their thoughts on the Spanish translation.

proletariat, and the mass organisations played similar roles to their sister organisations in the GDR. The existence of such structures in the Caribbean is the source of the common description of Cuba as “the GDR with palm trees” in both contemporary and Cold War literature, which plays on the apparent paradox between “societal” similarity and “natural” difference.⁵³

What exact role did nationalism take within the ideology of socialist convergence? While Lenin had seen that “Marxism cannot be reconciled with nationalism...in place of all forms of nationalism Marxism advances internationalism, the amalgamation of all nations in a higher unity,” GDR theorists presented this relationship as a dialectical one between the international and the national, in which the former took primacy.⁵⁴ Nationalism and national differences were the subjective products of bourgeois society, which would melt away in Lenin’s condition of “higher unity.” Yet national difference, racialized and gendered, was constantly reproduced in these documents, thus being continually renewed at the same time as it was conceptualised as a subjective relic of the past. This is particularly notable in light of repeated efforts on the part of GDR diplomats and functionaries to undermine ideas which divided the world into North-South distinctions. In 1976 the SED secretariat issued an argumentation document to its diplomats, ordering that, in order to “deepen relationships with non-aligned states,” it is to be argued that “the class-indifferent theory of ‘rich-poor’ or ‘North-South’ is intended to divide the developing countries and the socialist states from one another, to differentiate between them, and to play them against one another.”⁵⁵ As we will see, this conflict was one that was reproduced within the interstices of the GDR state itself.

⁵³ See for example Uta Keseling, “DDR unter Palmen: Auf der Suche nach dem echten Kuba,” *DIE WELT*, February 29, 2012, <https://www.welt.de/reise/Fern/article13893737/Auf-der-Suche-nach-dem-echten-Kuba.html>.

⁵⁴ V. I. Lenin, “Critical Remarks on the National Question,” in *Marxism & Nationalism*, by V. I. Lenin (London: Resistance Books, 2002), 63.”

⁵⁵ SAPMO-BArch, DY 30/580049, “Maßnahmen und Schlussfolgerungen aus den Ergebnissen der VII. UN-Sondertagung,” 3.

Cruises to Cuba

The GDR's fascination with Cuba followed what was to become a well-worn path with regard to socialist-South relations, with years of neglect in the pre-revolutionary era quickly replaced by a scrambling toward mutual recognition.⁵⁶ Doubts were raised about the socialist nature of the Cuban revolution in the early years of its existence. Dietrich Lemke, a trader for the GDR import-export company, travelled to Cuba in August and reported seeing nationalisations of key industries. He would later remember that “the streets were full of young and approving [*zustimmen*] people: signing, dancing, shouting...it was a different kind of progress [*Fortschritt*] from at home, somehow freer, more colourful, more joyful. On my return I reported to my general director that socialism was being built in Cuba. He retorted that the party would decide whether socialism was being built in Cuba or not.”⁵⁷ In October doubts were raised in a Department of Information report sent to Walter Ulbricht which suggested that, in face of growing “reactionary” power, the revolutionary government had made “many mistakes”: by nationalising too many small businesses, the government had created panic in the middle classes, who were now supporting counter-revolution, leaving the workers and peasantry isolated.⁵⁸ Later in the same month however, Politburo member Paul Verner returned from a trip as a special envoy to Cuba and reported that the Cubans had set a “revolutionary course” and that efforts should be made to deepen relations, to which the Politburo agreed.⁵⁹ A solidarity campaign was initiated in

⁵⁶ Jonathan C. Brown, *Cuba's Revolutionary World* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2017), 22.

⁵⁷ *Zement Gegen Südfrüchte: Kuba Und Die DDR* (NDR, 2007), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k1MM9i9R49Q>.

⁵⁸ SAPMO-BArch, DY 30/3647, “Probleme der innern- und wirtschaftspolitischen Lage Kubas,” 4.

⁵⁹ SAPMO-BArch, DY 30/J IV 2/2 724, “Protokoll Nr. 43/60,” p.4, see also Verner's report, *ibid.*, “Anlage Nr. 3 zum Protokoll Nr. 43 vom 13 September 1960.”

November which mostly revolved around increased press coverage in the GDR.⁶⁰ In December Che Guevara, then head of the National Bank of Cuba, visited the GDR as the head of an economic delegation. The delegation signed a treaty of economic co-operation, and Guevara spoke in a press conference of the bond between the GDR and Cuba, claiming an equivalence between Miami and West Berlin: “We also have large American bases on our borders, and one of these is even on our own land. We also experience the Americans sending spies to our country on a daily basis. Some reactionary people in our country have even called Miami ‘Cuba’s West Berlin.’”⁶¹ A treaty was signed in March 1961, detailing various forms of cultural exchange, and in May of that year FDGB chief Herbert Warnke travelled to Cuba, returning with the promise of more co-operation. In the same month the first GDR freight ship carrying goods to Cuba arrived in Havana, and returned carrying sugar from the country’s newly nationalised factories.⁶²

⁶⁰ SAPMO BArch, DY 30/3647, Letter to Neumann from Florin and Sinderman. 05.11.1961.

⁶¹ “Sozialistische Hilfe für Kuba stärker als alle Boykottmaßnahmen,” *Neues Deutschland*, 19 December 1960, 1.

⁶² SAPMO-BArch, DY 30/J IV 2/2 755, “Anlage Nr. 1 zum Protokoll nr. 13 vom 18. März 1961,” “Siegreiches Kuba vor großen Aufgaben,” *Neues Deutschland*, 19th May 1961, p.2, “10,000-Tonner „Schwerin“ aus Kuba zurückgekehrt,” *Neues Deutschland*, 21st May, 1961, 7.

One would suspect that it was during these meetings that the first tourist trip to



Figure 1: On board the *Völkerfreundschaft*. BStU MIS ZAIG 22671, p.30

Cuba, originally scheduled for November 1961, was planned, although the archival record reveals no exact agreements. Original plans for the *Völkerfreundschaft* had foreseen it travelling to capitalist countries, but the construction of the Berlin Wall in August of 1961, less than a year after its first journey, put an end to that idea. Original route plans were later declared invalid due to new regulations regarding visiting what became known as the *kapitalistisches Ausland*—the “capitalist abroad”—and this was originally intended to include Cuba.⁶³ It is notable, however, that following consultations with both the Central Committee's Secretariat for International Relations and the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, the Cuba route—which was repeatedly described as

⁶³ SAPMO-BArch, DY 34/24687, “Veränderte Routenpläne für die FDGB-Urlauberschiffe “MS *Völkerfreundschaft*” und TMS „Fritz Heckert“ 1961,” 1-2.

“politically important” in reports referring to it—was given the go-ahead, providing that the ships didn’t have to stop at any capitalist harbours on the way.⁶⁴

What, exactly, was this political importance? The FDGB Travel Service reported in November that it had struggled throughout the year to generate interest for its Baltic Sea cruises, which travelled to Gdynia in Poland and to Leningrad. The only other regular destination was the Black Sea, which, thanks to the risks of escape presented by passage through Istanbul, saw holiday makers travel by train to Odessa, where the trip started and ended.⁶⁵ The prospect of a winter journey to Cuba would surely prove more alluring to GDR citizens. However, the involvement of the Secretariat for International Relations suggests that the decision had more to do with political symbolism. The United States had fully cut off economic ties with Cuba only at the beginning of 1961. Despite the influx of international delegations from the socialist world in that year, the *Völkerfreundschaft* was, importantly, the first foreign tourist vessel to arrive in post-revolutionary Cuba when it docked in December 1961. Cuba’s isolation in this period should not be underestimated: when GDR journalist Herbert Otto visited Cuba at the end of 1960, he had to fly to the Dutch Antilles to get a connecting flight to the island.⁶⁶ Later, in 1971, an internal FDGB Travel Service evaluation of the cruises for the FDGB Federal Board claimed that Fidel Castro himself had “repeatedly emphasised” the importance of the early cruises to Cuba.⁶⁷

⁶⁴ The former, along with the Politburo, was the principal actor in GDR foreign policy, while the latter served as an executive body which oversaw the carrying out of decisions made at the party level. SAPMO-BArch, DY 34/24687, “Massnahmenplan auf Grund der Änderung der Reiserouten unserer Urlauberschiffe,” 2, and “Schiffsreise mit dem FDGB-Urlauberschiff MS „Völkerfreundschaft“ nach Kuba,” 1.

⁶⁵ SAPMO-BArch, DY 34/24687, “Schiffsreisen 1962 und Diskussionsgrundlage über Preisgestaltung im Feriendienst der Gewerkschaften,” 2.

⁶⁶ Herbert Otto, *Republik der Leidenschaft: Erlebnisse auf Kuba*. (Berlin: Verlag Volk und Welt, 1961), 16.

⁶⁷ SAPMO-BArch, DY 34/24944, “Ordnung über die Durchführung von Hochseeschiffsreisen des FDGB,” 25-26.

Exact numbers are difficult to come by, although there is consensus among scholars that Cuban tourist intake almost completely ceased during the 1960s. The vast bulk of pre-revolutionary tourism was from the US. Maria Delores Espino, for example, claims that international tourism “all but disappeared from the island” in immediate post-revolution years.⁶⁸ Miller et al similarly claim that tourism “collapsed” in the 1960s in the face of US embargo.⁶⁹ According to Chandana Jayawardena, annual tourist visits to Cuba in the 1960s averaged 3,000 a year.⁷⁰ In a synthesis of existing literature on the topic Tony L. Henthorne estimates that tourist numbers dived from 86,500 in 1960 to 4,180 in 1961, sinking as low as 361 in 1962 and then hovering around the 2,000 to 3,000 mark through to the mid-1970s.⁷¹ During the 1960s the *Völkerfreundschaft* generally travelled to Cuba twice a year, meaning that tourists from the ship would have represented a large proportion of Cuba's annual tourist intake.

⁶⁸ Maria Delores Espino, “Tourism in Cuba: A Development Strategy for the 1990s?,” *Cuban Studies* 23 (1993): 50.

⁶⁹ Mark M. Miller, Tony L. Henthorne, and Babu P. George, “The Competitiveness of the Cuban Tourism Industry in the Twenty-First Century: A Strategic Re-Evaluation,” *Journal of Travel Research* 46, no. 3 (February 1, 2008): 269.

⁷⁰ Chandana Jayawardena, “Revolution to Revolution: Why Is Tourism Booming in Cuba?,” *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management* 15, no. 1 (February 2003): 54.

⁷¹ Appendix in Tony L. Henthorne, *Tourism in Cuba: Casinos, Castros, and Challenges* (London: Emerald Group Publishing, 2018), 121-24.

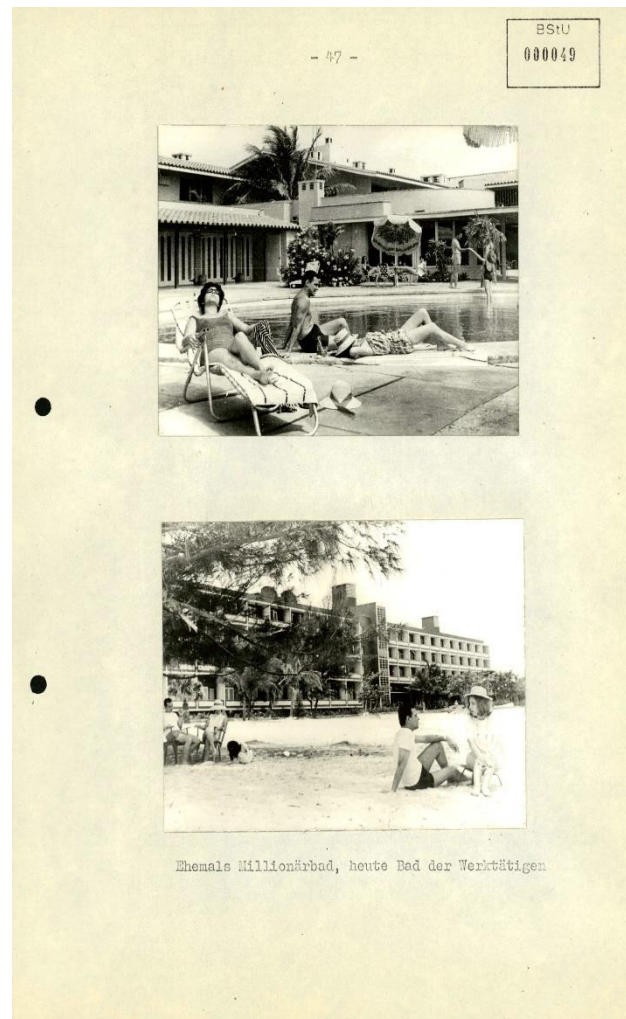


Figure 2: BStU HA VIII 1021, p.45

The first cruise carried 300 workers from various state-owned factories, who paid a subsidised price of 500 *Mark* (roughly a month's salary), and 150 members of the intelligentsia, who paid the full price, alongside a number of tractors that had been paid for by solidarity donations raised by the FDGB.⁷² As the ship arrived in Havana it was escorted by a Cuban military vessel and two other ships carrying workers and young pioneers.⁷³ The leader of the ship reported being greeted by “thousands of Cuban

⁷² SAPMO-BArch, NY 4421/38, “Bericht über die Reise des FDGB-Ulauberschiffes MS „Völkerfreundschaft“ nach Kuba,” 5.

⁷³ SAPMO-BArch, NY 4421/38, “Bericht über den Aufenthalt des MS „Völkerfreundschaft“ in Havanna,” 2.

friends with banners, radios, and loud speakers. They greeted us with speeches, revolutionary songs, and cheers for the GDR.” During the ship’s four day stay in the harbour, it was visited by over 7,000 Cubans.⁷⁴

The holiday program was a mixture of visits to factories, receptions arranged by the Cuban trade union, sightseeing, and beach visits. On the last day, the tourists were received at an event with 2,000 peasants who had recently completed a seven-month course in Havana learning to read and write, recipients of the revolution’s now famous Literacy Campaign.⁷⁵ The event apparently left a “deep impression” on the tourists, although some disappointment was registered at the fact that, although invited, Fidel Castro failed to turn up.⁷⁶ Despite some minor problems, the trip was evaluated by a senior FDGB functionary as “a great political success: the established goal of securing the existing connections with the CTC (Cuban Trade Union) and the workers of Cuba was to a great extent achieved.”⁷⁷ In particular, the report praised the move away from a focus on sightseeing and cultural monuments toward factory visits and mass meetings; a tension at the heart of socialist tourism throughout the latter half of the twentieth century, and nowhere more so than in relation to Cuba.

If political symbolism was at the forefront of the 1961 visit, it would be pushed to its limits during the next trip, in October of 1962. Assuming Henthorne’s estimate of annual tourist intake into Cuba in that year—362—is correct, the cruise would have represented the sum total of tourist visits to the island that whole year. Given events in Cuba, this is perhaps unsurprising: the Bay of Pigs invasion had preceded the first trip by a matter of months, and the second cruise sailed from Rostock shortly before the onset of the Cuban Missile Crisis. Rather than turning back, however, the

⁷⁴ SAPMO-BArch, NY 4421/38, “Bericht über die Reise des FDGB-Ulauberschiffes MS „Völkerfreundschaft“ nach Kuba,” 9.

⁷⁵ On the campaign, see Guerra, *Visions of Power in Cuba*, 158.

⁷⁶ SAPMO-BArch, NY 4421/38, “Bericht über den Aufenthalt des MS „Völkerfreundschaft“ in Havanna,” 5.

⁷⁷ *ibid.*, 2.

Völkerfreundschaft made the potentially reckless decision to break the US blockade of the island, a move that led to the possible interception of the ship being discussed by President John F. Kennedy and Secretary of Defence Robert S. MacNamara in the White House. Fear of escalation led to a decision to let the ship pass, though Kennedy was chastised by hardliners on the National Security Council for potentially allowing hundreds of nuclear rocket technicians to infiltrate their way into Cuba.⁷⁸ The following month a *Neues Deutschland* report on the incident would hammer home what was the overriding theme of the propaganda produced by the GDR with regards to Cuba in this period: the incident had proved, Hermann Burkhardt wrote, that the GDR and Cuba shared the same enemy and “are threatened by the same imperialist aggression.”⁷⁹

The most obvious political goal here was diplomatic recognition, which was a zero-sum game in the era of the West German Hallstein doctrine: one could be a friend of the GDR and enemy of the BRD, or vice versa, but not both.⁸⁰ Yet there was also a symbolism at play that sought to display the GDR as sharing the same fragile sense of sovereignty as Cuba, a fragility that demanded co-operation. Such political symbolism probably had an effect on the Cuban leaderships decision to formally recognise the GDR in January 1963. Notably, the East German state’s early efforts to integrate Cuba into the socialist system in some cases precipitated Soviet involvement, with GDR officials already pressuring the Soviets to allow Cuba to join COMECON in the autumn of 1960, for example.⁸¹ These attempts failed, and Cuba did not join COMECON until 1972, after a decade of tense relations with the Soviet Union sparked by Soviet disapproval of Cuba’s revolutionary internationalism.⁸² Throughout this difficult period,

⁷⁸ Stirn, *Traumschiffe des Sozialismus*, 181–84.

⁷⁹ “Völkerfreundschaft” trotzte USA-Piraten,” *Neues Deutschland*, 6th November 1962, p.5.

⁸⁰ On the Hallstein doctrine, see Booz, *Hallsteinzeit*.

⁸¹ SAPMO-BArch, DY 30/3465 Letter from Winzer to Ulbricht, 28th October 1960, 1.

⁸² H. Michael Erisman, “David Rising: Cuba and Its Northern Goliath in the 1970s,” in *Cuba’s Forgotten Decade: How the 1970s Shaped the Revolution*, ed. Emily J. Kirk, Anna Clayfield, and Isabel Story (London: Lexington Books, 2018), 25.

however, the GDR remained close to Cuba, particularly as an advocate, and as Raul Castro told a GDR delegation in 1973 the Cubans considered the East German state an important “bridge” between themselves and the Soviet Union.⁸³

Leaping to Freedom? Struggles over Meaning

The practice of organising cruises to Cuba didn’t become easier over time. Throughout their existence the cruises remained risky endeavours for GDR authorities concerned about their international image. Some escapes became worldwide news items. In the archives of the Stasi’s Central Evaluation and Information Group a folder of Western news clippings on escapes provides evidence of the great concern that GDR authorities placed upon them. One report in particular stands out. Carefully annotated with red pen by Stasi officials, a West German translation of a 1971 *Reader’s Digest* article entitled “Comrade Overboard,” features an extraordinary account from November of the previous year by a Florida-based American charter pilot, Ken Agnew:

For Karl Bley it was now or never. I put my single engine plane into a steep curve and flew in the direction of the East German cruise ship. This fly-by was the signal for the 24-year-old machine-fitter from the land behind the Iron Curtain to jump overboard.

I was overcome with doubt. The Atlantic is eleven kilometres from Florida Keys, the coral islands at the southern tip of Florida. The waters here are dangerous at the best of times, and on this November day they were particularly rough. After his leap into freedom he would have to deal with these waters, as well as reckoning with sharks as he dived into the maelstrom left behind by the ship’s propeller.⁸⁴

⁸³ Westad, *The Global Cold War*, 217.

⁸⁴ BStU, MfS, ZAIG, Nr. 9304, Band 4, “Genosse über Bord,” 13.

A Stasi report later described the events thus:

Karl-Heinz Bley prepared his escape through written communication with his brother Erik Bley, who lives in the USA. According to the Western press, Erik Bley had rented a motor yacht and hired a pilot with a private plane. The radio of the *MS Völkerfreundschaft* reported the presence of a plane and a motor boat near the Sombrero Beach in the straits of Florida at 08.00 hours on the morning of the 27.11.1970. Thereupon Karl-Heinz Bley jumped into the water, where he was immediately picked up by the motor boat.⁸⁵

During his escape, Bley was joined spontaneously by three other GDR citizens. It had been planned meticulously: the plane's fly-by was the signal for Bley to jump, and, wearing a bright coat with a life-jacket hidden underneath it, he was picked up by his brother before the crew of the *Völkerfreundschaft* could retrieve him. The event was reported widely in both the US and West Germany, with the four escapees holding a press conference.⁸⁶ This escape attempt proved to be one of the multiple occasions in which doubts were raised regarding the wisdom of carrying out such trips. Why were they allowed to continue? In response to these concerns, internal trade union documents frequently referenced the "political importance" of Cuba trips.⁸⁷ What was this importance? What did the trips mean to the GDR elite that ordered them to continue?

As we have seen, the material produced that surrounded cruises to Cuba contained several contradictory messages. Expressions of these contradictions could be found—

⁸⁵ BTsU, MfS, HA XX, 9513, "Information über das gesetzwidrige Verlassen der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik durch vier DDR-Bürger unter Ausnutzung einer Schiffsreise in die Republik Kuba," 39-40.

⁸⁶ "Four Flee East German Ship in Leap Off Florida Keys," *The New York Times*, November 28, 1970, sec. Archives, <https://www.nytimes.com/1970/11/28/archives/four-flee-east-german-ship-in-leap-off-florida-keys-rescue-from-sea.html>.

⁸⁷ See for example the demand on behalf of the FDGB that "politically important" trips to Cuba must continue despite the building of the wall: SAPMO-BArch, DY 34/24687, "Massnahmeplan auf Grund der Änderung der Reiserouten unserer Urlauberschiffe," 2.

indeed in some ways were directly mirrored—between the various state bodies that administered cruises to Cuba. The foreign policy aims of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs as well as the more influential Central Committee Secretariat for International Relations were not at always in concert with those of the FDGB for whom, as we have seen, the ships were supposed to boost productivity through the means of leisure. The Stasi, concerned about *Republikflucht*, frequently chided the FDGB for either having not strong enough selection procedures or, in one case, ignoring instructions to rescind a travel permit that led to an escape.⁸⁸ Likewise the federal board of the FDGB made several attempts to encourage district offices to be more selective. Other state bodies with more financial concerns pushed for the chartering of the ships to Western agencies, a responsibility that was eventually taken up by Schalk-Golodkowski's *KoKo*. The ships' use for the purposes of foreign policy sometimes trumped that of leisure. When Greece, a NATO member state, refused to allow Walter Ulbricht to fly through its airspace en route to a state visit to Egypt in 1963, the fourth and fifth cruises to Cuba were cancelled at extremely short notice so that the *Völkerfreundschaft* could transport Ulbricht from Dubrovnik to Cairo.⁸⁹

Even within the realm of leisure the trips to Cuba were subject to institutional wrangling. Although originally an idea of the FDGB chief Herbert Warnke and supposedly an expression of unity between government and the trade union, the ships were taken out of trade union ownership in 1964 and put in control of the German Shipping Company [Deutsche Seereederei], (DSR). The original practice of providing holiday places for workers at discounted rates had proved too costly for the FDGB, which had shifted to allowing individual state-owned companies to set prices in 1962. This in turn had led to difficulty in selling places on the ships; in 1962, almost 2,500 had

⁸⁸ BTsU, MfS HA XX 9513 E, "Verlust eines Fernscheibens in der Abteilung PM des PdVP Berlin," 76.

⁸⁹ Rainer A. Blasius, "'Völkerfreundschaft' am Nil: Ägypten und die DDR im Februar 1965. Stenographische Aufzeichnungen aus dem Ministerium für Auswärtige Angelegenheiten über den Ulbricht-Besuch bei Nasser," *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 46, no. 4 (1998): 466.

gone unused.⁹⁰ This difficulty, combined with new regulations following the building of the Berlin Wall which reduced the propagandistic potential of the ships by reducing the number of possible destinations, made the expense of administering the ships less appealing for the FDGB.⁹¹

Although the ships were still to bear (to quote the directive which established the takeover) “the particular character of a union ship,”⁹² carry the FDGB flag, and serve FDGB members for the most part, the emphasis now shifted toward cost-effectiveness. This meant an increase in the chartering of the ships both by foreign travel agencies and by the *Reisebüro*. In contrast to the FDGB *Feriedienst*, which sought, by means of its integration into the trade union, to tie tourism to a broader conception of social policy—offering subsidised holidays that were often bound to fulfilment of quotas in the workplace—the *Reisebüro* was a somewhat more straightforward travel agency. It offered holidays at cost price, usually at levels which were only affordable for a tiny fraction of GDR citizens.

The institutional squabbles which pepper the archival material on the ships may appear inconsequential and at times they verge on comical, including one occasion where the head of the FDGB *Feriedienst* wrote to the DSR to complain that it was “unacceptable” that publications were being produced that referenced the ships without using the label “FDGB-Urlauberschiff.”⁹³ Beyond these seemingly petty arguments, however, lay a much more meaningful truth. Contradiction, as we have already established, lay at the heart of the material produced in relation to the trips. This contradiction was in part the product of paradoxes within the body of Marxist-Leninist ideology, but it could also manifest through dissonance within the state itself. While the demand for ideological conformity ensured that the abstract end-goal remained the

⁹⁰ SAPMO-BArch, DY 34/24688, “Präsidiumsvorlage,” 30.4.1963, 77.

⁹¹ Stirn, *Traumschiffe des Sozialismus*, 442.

⁹² SAPMO-BArch, DY 34/24688, “Präsidiumsvorlage,” 30.4.1963, 77.

⁹³ SAPMO-BArch, DY 34/13678, “Fragen- und Problemkomplex zum FDGB-Urlauberschiff Arkona,” 1

same, different institutions and different nodes of power often sought different paths toward this end.⁹⁴ The need to provide GDR citizens with “exotic” holiday destinations could come into conflict with the need for showing them that they were a part of a growing, converging socialist world system, for the former required othering, and the latter inclusivity.

From the beginning of the 1960s onwards the FDGB lost its institutional dominance over the holidays to Cuba, which in turn lost some sense of their earlier, symbolic, socialist character. The early 1960’s emphasis on factory visits and mass meetings decreased as time went on, financial concerns increased, and FDGB control waned, and the contradiction between the bonding of the peoples of the socialist world system on one hand and the exoticisation of Cuba on the other therefore shifted in emphasis toward the latter. These conflicting images are evident in the documents given to travellers when they set off for Cuba, which detailed Cuba’s history and the attractions that they would visit once there. Throughout the 1970s a subtle difference between *Reisebüro* and FDGB guides began to grow. Two examples from the early 1980s, for example, feature broadly similar itineraries, but frame them very differently. One aspect shared by both is a visit to the Bay of Pigs. The FDGB tourists travelled to the actual landing point of Playa Girón, which is narrated thus: “With the landing of the imperialist soldiers at the Bay of Pigs, the aggressors hoped to destroy the Cuban revolution. They had not reckoned, however, with the people and their heroic determination. The enemy was well armed and well trained, but the liberated people of Cuba needed less than 72 hours to deliver a decisive victory over them. It was the first military defeat of

⁹⁴ The idea that power was something that emanated cleanly from top to bottom in the GDR has been challenged by a number of authors. Jan Palmowski, for example, has shown the importance of regionalism in diffusing the forms of power produced by the doctrine of democratic centralism. See Jan Palmowski, “Regional Identities and the Limits of Democratic Centralism in the GDR,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 41, no. 3 (July 1, 2006): 503–26.

imperialism in America, and the myth of the invincibility of North American imperialism collapsed with it.”⁹⁵

The *Reisebüro* guide contains the same passage word-for-word, but is prefaced with the sentence “were one to continue the journey 35km south, one would reach the historic Giron beach [sic].” *Reisebüro* travellers were instead taken the Playa Larga, also a landing-point during the Bay of Pigs invasion, but described thus by the guidebook: “A beautiful section of beach with fine sand, washed by the calm blue waters of the Caribbean sea. Rising from the beach is a modern building, fitted with guest cabins, featuring a restaurant of the finest quality and a café.”⁹⁶ Whereas on FDGB trips Cuba’s revolutionary history may have been the main event, for the *Reisebüro* it was more of an ornament to the principal goal of pleasure seeking.

The tourist program had stayed roughly the same throughout the 1960s: visitors held numerous “friendship meetings” with Cuban trade unions, and were taken on tours of Havana, a tobacco factory in La Corona, and the former home of Ernest Hemingway in San Francisco de Paulo, which had been made into a museum. In 1967 the first visit to a tourist centre in the national park Cienaga de Zapata was established.⁹⁷ In the 1970s guidebooks began to emphasise the more consumerist pleasures of Cuba: one *Reisebüro* guide from the latter part of the decade featured a phrasebook in which contained phrases such as “long live the friendship between our countries”; “the struggle”; “fatherland or death”; and “freedom”; as well as “where is the hotel?”; “how much does a beer cost?”; and “swimming pool.”⁹⁸ This change was driven by changing priorities on both sides; as the *Reisebüro* took increasing control on the GDR side, the Castro regime in Cuba began to scale back the emphasis on domestic and socialist

⁹⁵ SAPMO-BArch, DY 34/13678, “Mit dem MS Arkona auf Kuba Kurs, 1985,” 129.

⁹⁶ SAPMO-BArch, DY 34/13678, “Wissenwertes über Kuba,” 11.

⁹⁷ “Völkerfreundschaft’ auf Kuba-Kurs,” *Neue Zeit*, 19.11.1967, 6.

⁹⁸ BTsU, MfS, HA IX 16429, “Information zur Republik Kuba,” 14-15.

tourism in favour of hard currency-producing international tourism, with tourist arrivals increasing from 15,000 in 1974 to 130,000 in 1979.⁹⁹

Later itineraries dropped the meetings and factory visits entirely and replaced them with trips to more tourist centres. The centrepiece of the visits in the 1970s became the Club Tropicana, a cabaret night club which became famous as a symbol of pre-revolutionary hedonism and US influence in the 1950s. As Elizabeth Schwall has shown, cabaret had always held an uncertain place in revolutionary Cuban society: both a relic of the Batista era while at the same time embodying a “liberated revolutionary spirit.”¹⁰⁰ While the transformation of former locations of foreign vice into sites of socialist pleasure was an early revolutionary motif, this was challenged during Castro’s 1968 “Revolutionary Offensive” which closed bars, nightclubs, and liquor stands on the basis that they perpetuated pre-revolutionary values.¹⁰¹ The Tropicana was nevertheless quickly reopened at the beginning of the 1970s.¹⁰²

During the decade the “Tropicana Revue” featured regularly on television in the GDR, and the first co-produced Cuban-GDR television program was made in 1975, featuring music videos from GDR pop stars Frank Schöbel, Dean Reed, and Aurora Lacasa. Schöbel’s video, in particular, represented a continuation of the objectification of female Cubans—Schöbel is filmed walking down the Malecón in Havana flanked by apparently adoring Cuban women—that was seen earlier in travel accounts from the 1960s, but without any of the revolutionary heroism that had accompanied this imagery earlier. In 1976 another GDR pop star, Chris Doerk, performed the song “Cuba” with

⁹⁹ Henthorne, *Tourism in Cuba*, 123.

¹⁰⁰ Elizabeth Schwall, “Between Espiritu and Conciencia: Cabaret and Ballet Developments in 1960s Cuba,” in *The Revolution from Within: Cuba, 1959-1980*, ed. Michael J. Bustamante and Jennifer L. Lambe (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2019), 146.

¹⁰¹ Guerra, *Visions of Power in Cuba: Revolution, Redemption, and Resistance, 1959-1971*, 301.

¹⁰² Schwall, “Between Espiritu and Conciencia: Cabaret and Ballet Developments in 1960s Cuba,” 155.

the island's National Folk Ensemble for *Ein Kessel Bunter*, the GDR's variety show.¹⁰³ Doerk travelled frequently to Cuba and later wrote a memoir of her time there, from which "revolutionary" content was absent.¹⁰⁴ The text could have been produced by any Western visitor, as many similar texts were; as Cuba began to aggressively market itself from the early 1970s onward as a tourist destination for Canadians and Western Europeans, and as the GDR trips began to lose their earlier socialist content the two groups presumably had similar experiences. The 1970s in Cuba have been described by historians as "the grey years," defined by rapprochement with the Soviets and a corresponding growth in ideological dogmatism and bureaucratisation.¹⁰⁵ While such dogmatism might have meant that socialist content survived the tourist drive to a degree during the decade, the emphasis placed on international tourism had flushed it out by the 1980s. The *New York Times* reported that shows at the Tropicana remained politicised in the mid-1970s, but by 1984 it could be claimed that performances were almost completely "politics-free."¹⁰⁶

As the 1980s approached, Stasi reports began show two notable trends: increasing fears of "contamination" resulting from contact with foreigners, particularly West Germans, and increasing instances of GDR tourists having items stolen by Cubans. This culminated in a prominent Politburo member's son being mugged at knifepoint in Havana in 1986, an event that caused the involvement of the Stasi.¹⁰⁷ As fraternalism declined and Cuba opened itself up to the Western world, the argument that the GDR and Cuba were two forms of the same type became harder to sustain: Doerk and

¹⁰³ Hans-Ulrich Brandt et al., *Das war unser Kessel Bunter* (Berlin: Homilius, K, 2002).

¹⁰⁴ Chris Doerk and Klaus D. Schwarz, *La Casita: Geschichten aus Cuba* (Berlin: Das Neue Berlin, 2002).

¹⁰⁵ Emily J. Kirk, Anna Clayfield, and Isabel Story, "Introduction: Cuba's Forgotten Decade," in *Cuba's Forgotten Decade: How the 1970s Shaped the Revolution*, ed. Emily J. Kirk, Anna Clayfield, and Isabel Story (London: Lexington Books, 2018), 8.

¹⁰⁶ Joseph B. Treaster, "The Pride of Casto's Cuba: A Pre-Castro Cabaret," *The New York Times*, May 16, 1984.

¹⁰⁷ BtSU, MfS Abt. X 2381, "Vermerk," 1st April 1986, 48.

Schöbel stand in strong contrast to Tamara Bunke, and the tourists who had once held fraternal meetings with Cubans in tobacco factories now principally interacted with those who served them drinks and food or performed for them in established tourist centres.

Increasingly then, the idea of an extended *Heimat* faded from view. When the *Völkerfreundschaft* was withdrawn from service in 1985, its replacement, the *Arkona*, was purchased with the earning of hard currency in mind as much as FDGB holidays.¹⁰⁸

As the ideal of convergence disappeared, the journeys to Cuba became subject to increased security scrutiny. Stasi presence on the ships was a constant from the beginning; as well as official agents being on board, “IM’s,” [inoffizieller Mitarbeiter], or informal Stasi collaborators, occupied key roles including the culture officer and the captain.¹⁰⁹ One Stasi report in 1968 suggested that 4.5 percent of those on board were “registered” [erfasste] with the Stasi, meaning that they were either IM’s or official agents.¹¹⁰ However, security on the *Arkona* was considerably more advanced than on its predecessor: while for the *Völkerfreundschaft* most of the responsibility for security was left to the Harbour Department of the regional administration of Rostock, by 1985 the security operation had ballooned, and involved five different Stasi departments and two working groups.¹¹¹ The Stasi *Hochschule* consistently produced reports that reflected an increasing sense of isolation, mapping out potential gateways, lapses, or holes in the socialist world system. One lengthy report in 1983 on the security demands of tourism framed the system as a sort of archipelago. Noting the importance of the “control, surveillance, and securing” of tourist traffic, the report highlighted the Cuba trips and the “key priority areas” of sovereign “non-socialist waters” through which the ship must

¹⁰⁸ See the reasons listed for purchase in a letter from KoKo chief Schalck-Golodowski BStU, MfS HA XIX 2457, Letter from Schalck-Golodowski to Mielke, 24.04.1985, 207.

¹⁰⁹ BStU, MfS BV Rst Leiter der BV Nr. 97, Teil 2.

¹¹⁰ BStU, MfS ZAIG, 22671, “Schiffsreise,” 57.

¹¹¹ Compare BStU, MfS BV Rostock KS 14-63, Band 2, “FDGB Urlauberschiff MS ‚Völkerfreundschaft‘, with BStU, MfS HA XIX 12213, ‘Politisch-operative Sicherung des Passagierschiffes MS Arkona” 7-11.

travel: the Fehmarn Belt (a strait connecting Kiel and Mecklenburg), the northernmost tip of Denmark, the straits of Dover, the Azores, the Caicos Islands, Winhard and the Florida straits.¹¹²

Conclusion

In the 1960s Cuba was site of confident outward projection for the GDR, a symbol of a positive global vision for a socialist world, but early confidence would falter in the 1970s. Indeed, from the beginning this vision was bound up with contradiction, and this contradiction manifested itself through dissonance within the socialist state itself. This antagonism contributed to the production of a distinctive vision of socialist globalisation in the GDR which, in the 1960s, imagined the East German state as a component part of a growing global system of socialist states that shared sovereignty. Rather than signifying an unrestricted openness toward the global, it was *archipelagic*; it imagined shared sovereignty and convergence between socialist societies across the globe as creating a sort of socialist archipelago, with the capitalist world representing dangerous seas between various red islands. While this archipelago started out as a transitional object that would grow as the world transformed toward socialism, the optimism of this vision faltered as time passed and as socialism's prospects worldwide faltered.

In his seminal work, *The Tourist*, Dean MacCannell stated that he had originally “planned to study tourism and revolution, which seemed...to name the two poles of modern consciousness—a willingness to accept, even venerate, things as they are on the one hand, a desire to transform things on the other.”¹¹³ In the end MacCannell settled on studying only the former. This tension is worth revisiting in this case however, in two

¹¹² BStU, JHS 245-82, “Aktuelle und perspektivische Erfordernisse sowie politisch operative Arbeitsprozesse zur Sicherung des Reise- und Touristenverkehrs aus der DDR nach anderen sozialistischen Staaten,” 40.

¹¹³ Dean MacCannell, *The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class* (London: University of California Press, 2013), 3.

senses. Firstly, it is a tension at the heart of the institution of state socialist tourism itself, an institution characterised by what Christopher Görlich has called *Utopieverlust*, or “loss of Utopia.”¹¹⁴ Tourism in state socialism bore the dual stamps of veneration and revolution in that it sought both to create a new, revolutionary form of leisure that in turn would contribute to the construction of the new socialist human, but also in that it was designed to engender loyalty to the state and thus passivity. In his history of tourism in the GDR Görlich claims that from the 1960s onwards veneration became increasingly prominent as the tying of tourism to the “realisation of socialism” was replaced by a pragmatic focus upon improving the quality and quantity of holidays.¹¹⁵ As tourism to Cuba shed its earlier ideological baggage in the 1970s and 1980s and increasingly became the remit of the *Reisebüro* instead of the FDGB or the foreign office, it became a part of this story of *Utopieverlust*.

In the 1960s socialist world system was imagined as a growing, transformative object, but over time, the system failed to expand. As the Cold War went on, the optimism of the global visions of communist leaders began to appear misplaced, and the socialist world system ceased to appear as a growing “reserve of socialism” and started to resemble an ossified archipelago of isolated socialist islands. As the power of this vision lost its strength the internal fissures of the socialist state came into clearer focus. By the 1980s, the cruise liners were much more important to institutions like the *Reisebüro* and *KoKo*: holidays to Cuba became more about winter holidays and raising foreign currency than transforming individuals. This adds further evidence to the story of *Utopieverlust*: factory visits were replaced by visits to tourist resorts, thus increasing prominence of the idea of the national over the international, or, to use MacCannell’s formulation, veneration over revolution. Over time, tourism came to be less about transforming the world, and more about individual institutions within the state fulfilling domestic obligations towards its own citizens.

¹¹⁴ Görlich, *Urlaub vom Staat*, 7.

¹¹⁵ *ibid.*, 168-69.

Chapter Five - Depicting the Proto-Socialist World on Screen: *Treffpunkt Flughafen*

For us, all media are equally indispensable as instruments of the Party. Every medium has its own place, its own specific potential impact. Together they form our reliable ideological orchestra. And in opposition to certain composers, we prefer neither the strings nor the brass, nor also the flutes. The Party's score has enough notes for all.

Werner Lamberz, 1976.¹

Although our two states are located on different continents, Socialist Ethiopia is close and dear to every citizen of our country.

Erich Honecker to Mengistu Haile Mariam, 1978.²

Introduction

The idea of proto-socialism was not bound to the workplace, the halls of foreign policy institutes, FDGB foreign travel brochures, or the institutes for foreign students. While the practice of making solidarity donations brought the proto-socialist world to citizens on the factory floor and FDGB cruise ships allowed a limited number of them to travel

¹ SAPMO-BArch, DY 30/477, "Schlusswort des Genossen Werner Lamberz," 1-2.

² SAPMO-BArch, DY 30/2419 "Toast während des Essens zu Ehren Mengistu Haile Mariam," 1.

to it, television allowed for the domestication of proto-socialism: ensuring that depictions and images of the proto-socialist world entered the everyday home life of citizens. The GDR's turn to the proto-socialist world was broadly coterminous with what Christine Elaine Evans has defined as the Soviet "era of television", one which "began in the late 1950s...found its enduring forms in the second half of the 1960s, and realized its multiple, contradictory visions in the decades that followed."³ As a mass medium, TV showed a similar trajectory in the GDR, growing rapidly throughout the 1960s. At the beginning of the decade there were 16.8 inhabitants per TV set: this figure had dropped to 5.3 five years later, further sinking to 3.8 by 1975, with the GDR consistently displaying the highest diffusion of TV sets across the Eastern Bloc.⁴ By 1976, propaganda chief Werner Lamberz could speak at the annual conference of the GDR state television company of an "explosion of expectation" regarding East German TV: "Television has become an indispensable aspect of everyday life, an elementary spiritual requirement [geistigen Bedürfnis]... if it were to suddenly disappear then people would realise how much they needed it, how much was suddenly missing."⁵

As Michele Hilmes has shown, states in the twentieth century deployed TV as a "national circulatory system, delivering the signs and symbols of the national imaginary across geographical space in individual homes and minds, both reflecting and consolidating key elements of national identity." But equally as important to this national function was TV's transnational role as a gatekeeper. By virtue of being state controlled, TV could, to quote Hilmes again, hold "forces from outside the nation at bay, or contain them in a negotiated space."⁶ Via the medium of TV, the proto-socialist world could be

³ Christine Elaine Evans, *Between Truth and Time: A History of Soviet Central Television* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016), 2.

⁴ Sabina Mihelj and Simon Huxtable, *From Media Systems to Media Cultures: Understanding Socialist Television* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 78.

⁵ SAPMO-BArch, DY 30/477, "Schlusswort des Genossen Werner Lamberz," 1-2.

⁶ Michele Hilmes, *Network Nations: A Transnational History of British and American Broadcasting* (London: Routledge, 2012), 2.

depicted in a stable and controlled way, shorn for the most part from the dangers of infiltration or escape and the complexities of real world connection. In other words, it could be presented in its ideal form. Depictions of the proto-socialist world on GDR TV thus reveal much about the reality of proto-socialism, as an ideological construction and a feature of everyday life in the GDR.

A quick scan at weekly TV listings in the *Neues Deutschland* shows that reflections of the proto-socialist turn are easy to find. The shape and form of these reflections were not static however, but rather shifted over time, responding in turn to shifting ideas regarding the most effective means of conveying the idea of proto-socialism on TV screens. The mid-1980s TV series *Treffpunkt Flughafen*, a nine-part mini-series following the adventures of the crew of an Interflug jet as they traversed the proto-socialist world, was the culmination of roughly twenty years of this evolution. Its importance for this thesis is thus two-fold. In the first instance, it serves as an example of the domestication of proto-socialism as an idea: evidence of the ways in which GDR authorities sought to translate grand ideology into everyday entertainment, thus buttressing the claim of proto-socialism's important place in everyday life in the GDR. Secondly, focusing on *Treffpunkt Flughafen* allows for a snapshot of the state of proto-socialism in its "mature" phase in the 1980s. As we shall see, many of the distinguishing features of the GDR's idiosyncratic vision of socialist globalization were still very much in evidence during this decade. Yet in both *Treffpunkt Flughafen's* content and the making of the show, we also see how tired this vision had grown, stripped of its earlier revolutionary zeal and replaced with archipelagic quality of socialist integration.

The Proto-Socialist World as Entertainment in *Treffpunkt Flughafen*

Treffpunkt Flughafen was intended to combine entertainment with education: in this case, the everyday experience of collective work was placed together with broader

geopolitical ideas regarding proto-socialism. This followed an established pattern in GDR TV, with series often revolving around specific themes and carrying an explicitly pedagogical edge, often involving the relevant state departments being commissioned to help produce the series. For example, Heather Gumbert has argued that the crime series *Blaulicht*, which ran from 1959 to 1968, was one of the first examples of the way GDR TV used entertainment as a “maker and disseminator of narratives,” in this case helping to justify the building of the Berlin Wall.⁷ Similarly, scholars have shown how one of the GDR’s most popular shows, the crime drama *Polizeiruf 101* (1972–1990), which was made with help from the Ministry of the Interior, helped to articulate the specific nature of crime in the GDR by showing “that crime is not rooted in problems of society but rather in alienation from society.”⁸

Another of the GDR’s popular miniseries was *Zur See*, which was produced in cooperation with the National Shipping Company, [Deutsche Seereederei] (DSR). The nine-part series ran from 1974 to 1976 and focused on the escapades of the crew of a freight ship as it travelled across the globe, proving popular with audiences. Jürgen Zartmann, an actor in *Treffpunkt Flughafen*, would claim later that the principle aim of the show was to repeat the success of *Zur See*.⁹ The two shows shared many of the same cast and crew, including Zartmann himself. In the short space of time that passed between them, however, the international context had shifted quite dramatically. While *Zur See* was produced and screened at the high point of détente, *Treffpunkt Flughafen* took place as this easing of tensions unravelled. As a consequence, as Andreas Neumann has shown, *Treffpunkt Flughafen* was much more focused on anti-imperialism, with numerous explicit references to US aggression. Similarly, whereas *Zur See* mostly

⁷ Gumbert, *Envisioning Socialism* Page?

⁸ R. E. Rauxloh, “Goodies and Baddies: The Presentation of German Police and Criminals in East and West Television Drama,” *German Law Journal* 6 (2005): 1000.

⁹ “Weite Ferne Und Fliegen Wohin Man Will” (DDR-TV-Archiv, 2010).

featured European destinations (as well as Cuba), *Treffpunkt Flughafen* took place mostly in the proto-socialist world, in locations such as Angola, Vietnam, or Nicaragua.¹⁰

This focus on the proto-socialist world was an integral part of the production of *Treffpunkt Flughafen*. At a meeting of the SED district administration for TV in May 1984, the leader of the Agitprop department, Heinz Geggel, claimed that rising temperatures in the Cold War would affect “all television departments...from the *Aktuellen Kamera* to the workshops, and to the drama and make-up departments.” The question that followed from this, for Geggel, was “how can we use this instrument better and more effectively...for the strengthening of socialism and the securing of peace, not just in general, but specifically here, where the GDR currently lies: on the dividing line between two societal systems and during a time of an exceptional *Auseinanderstzung* between these two systems.”¹¹ *Treffpunkt Flughafen* would thus serve to entertain while reflecting the heightened tensions of its era.

At the heart of the show was a multinational crew featuring Cuban and Vietnamese members, organised together as a *Kollektiv*, one of the smallest forms of workers’ organisation in the GDR. At the head was well-known actor Günter Nauman, who had starred in *Zur See* and played pilot Werner Steinitz, the patriarch of the group. The crew is presented as tightly-knit and comradely, frequently overcoming small conflicts or working together to solve problems. Episodes combined melodrama and action sequences with different proto-socialist locations providing backdrop: socialist internationalist themes combined with storylines which inadvertently highlighted the increasingly archipelagic nature of socialist globalization by the 1980s.

The jet travels to the Soviet Union, Nicaragua, Cuba, Angola, Nigeria, Algeria and Mozambique, among others. The crew’s personal lives are depicted as deeply enmeshed with the broader geopolitical world, and they frequently make personal

¹⁰ Andreas Neumann, *Von Indianern, Geistern und Parteisoldaten* (Berlin: be.bra wissenschaft verlag, 2019), 260.

¹¹ SAPMO-BArch, DY 30/498, “Schlusswort Heinz Geggel,” 2.

sacrifices in order to further the GDR's international standing. In episode Five, for example, Steinitz is forced to cancel a planned holiday with his wife to the Ostsee in order to pilot a freight flight carrying public address systems to Angola for an emergency congress. Trying to quell her anger, Steinitz seeks to play down the distance, claiming that Angola is just a "stone's throw" from the GDR, and eventually arguing that without Angolan oil, his plane would be unable to operate.¹² Later Steinitz delays his return flight in order to help a group of stranded FDJ aid workers: his efforts are later lauded by an Angolan comrade who had studied in the GDR, who tells him to tell his wife "that she is his sister and that he is grateful for Steinitz friendship."¹³

Two episodes serve as introductions to the crew's non-German members, set their home nations of Vietnam and Cuba. Episode Two sees Paul Mittelstadt, the co-pilot and key character throughout the series, get stuck in Cuba due to a faulty plane. Paul goes to stay with the Cuban pilot Santiago's family in Cojimar, where he bonds with Santiago's family in a narrative that features an enmeshing of the political and the personal. The fact that Santiago's sister gives birth in the local clinic is clearly signposted, for example; the legacy of Hemingway, who had lived in Cojimar and whose former villa was part of the standard GDR tourist trail, comes up frequently; Mittelstadt joins in a collective effort to aid the sugar harvest—which is done with machetes, much to Paul's surprise. "Mostly we do this with machines but unfortunately on some fields we still do it by hand," Santiago notes, in an obvious nod to Cuba's "underdevelopment."¹⁴ Perhaps the most obvious political metaphor comes in a scene where Paul has to be rescued from shark-infested waters by an armed contingent of Cuban border guards, who shoot a shark in the process.

¹² Manfred Mosblech, "Italienisches Zimmer - Afrikanische Nacht," *Treffpunkt Flughafen* (DDR 1, March 23, 1986).

¹³ Mosblech.

¹⁴ Manfred Mosblech, "Heißer Tag in Cojimar," *Treffpunkt Flughafen* (DDR 1, March 2, 1986).

A developmentalist, stage-based conception of history was prominent in the crew's interactions with people from the proto-socialist world. In episode Six Paul visits Li's family in Vietnam during a stop-over. Similar themes of development play out as those in Cuba: as Paul offers to help out on a rice paddy where ox-drawn ploughs cultivate the soil, Li notes, "we do a lot with our hands because we are still at the beginning; without the war, we would be much further on."¹⁵ In episode Seven, the crew travel to Nicaragua to pick up wounded Sandinistas who are to be treated in the GDR, a reflection of a real-world practice.¹⁶ Here again Paul is reminded by a figure from the proto-socialist world—a Nicaraguan—that, despite the GDR having "issues," Nicaragua's were larger: "You live in a secure land, without problems, in freedom...our revolution is young, and we are threatened from the outside. The first steps in a new country are difficult."¹⁷ At the other end of the spectrum the Soviet Union, at the pinnacle of the developmentalist ladder, was presented as the patriarch of the socialist family. The opening episode features a trip to Moscow; a modern, orderly metropolis where the crew go to meet a retired, statesmanlike Russian pilot who, it emerges, trained Werner Steinitz.¹⁸ As Andreas Neumann has noted, "in *Treffpunkt Flughafen* the GDR and the destination of the crew appear not only as geographical locations, but also stand as symbolised societal stages of development."¹⁹

Just as with tourist trips to Cuba, the series represented the proto-socialist world both as a space of comradeship and brotherhood *and* as a site of radical difference. Both the main characters from the proto-socialist world, Li and Santiago, were represented as

¹⁵ Manfred Mosblech, "Eine Lektion Für Paul," *Treffpunkt Flughafen* (DDR 1, March 30, 1986).

¹⁶ On this, see Iris Borowy, "East German Medical Aid to Nicaragua: The Politics of Solidarity between Biomedicine and Primary Health Care," *História, Ciências, Saúde-Manguinhos* 24, no. 2 (April 2017): 411–28.

¹⁷ Manfred Mosblech, "Das Tor in Den Wolken," *Treffpunkt Flughafen* (DDR 1, April 6, 1986).

¹⁸ Manfred Mosblech, "Landeanflug," *Treffpunkt Flughafen* (DDR 1, February 23, 1986).

¹⁹ Neumann, *Von Indianern, Geistern und Parteisolddaten*, 258.

revolutionary, pro-socialist subjects. In one episode Li tells a fellow flight attendant about her upbringing: raised in a small village, Li's village was bombed on a regular basis, including a napalm attack on her school; while other children "wanted to become fighter pilots so they could attack the planes that bombed them," Li "just wanted a plane for me and my parents to fly far away where there were no explosions, where peace is." The war, Li noted in a possible nod to the pedagogical intentions of the show, lasted "her whole childhood: 12 years."²⁰ Santiago reveals he was educated in Leningrad, and at one point breaks into song about Stalin that he learnt there.²¹

Both Li and Santiago act as symbolic stand-ins for their respective nations' place in socialist hagiography; Li the brave victim of US imperialism—at one point almost the subject of a rogue US mercenary who claims "he fought people like her in the Mekong Delta"—and Santiago rugged, resourceful, and passionate. Acting as stand-ins, however, meant that both characters were heavily othered and sexualised. Santiago patiently puts up with having his hair commented upon and touched by Germans, while Li is subject to almost constant advances from German men. Indeed, throughout the series, non-white bodies are frequently objectified: in a scene set in Angola in episode Five, the crew party in a hotel that an Angolan friend tells them was previously owned by West Germans. Here, the working class expropriation of the leisure sites of the international bourgeoisie, as seen earlier in Cuba, was interspersed with close-ups of barely dressed "Angolan" women dancing.²² The exoticization of the non-European world is constant throughout: Santiago regularly makes jokes about German food and weather, and planes landing in Luanda or Lagos are shown, using stock footage, to be landing on dusty runways surrounded by wildlife.

²⁰ Manfred Mosblech, "Mayday, Mayday," *Treffpunkt Flughafen* (DDR 1, March 9, 1986).

²¹ Mosblech, "Landeanflug."

²² Manfred Mosblech, "Italienisches Zimmer - Afrikanische Nacht," *Treffpunkt Flughafen* (DDR 1, March 23, 1986).

As we have seen elsewhere, the idea that the proto-socialist world would be a source of strength for the GDR slowly deteriorated throughout the 1970s, and by the 1980s global socialism was imagined as a sort of archipelago, with increasingly isolated pockets of socialism surrounded by capitalist territory. While the capitalist world always appeared dangerous to socialist leaders, it was only during the late 1970s, as we have seen, that GDR foreign policy experts began to posit the proto-socialist world as a place which emanated danger. Despite its attempt to show the “international recognition” of the GDR, *Treffpunkt Flughafen* couldn’t help but transmit this archipelagic concept of sovereignty. As a metaphor, air travel served neatly as a means of exploring themes of isolation and connection. As scholars have noted, airports only *appear* to provide seamless travel, in fact distancing as they connect: “The system of airports links together places, forming networks that bring connected places closer together, while distancing those places that are not so connected,” Hannam et al. have argued.²³ Montage shots in *Treffpunkt Flughafen* often depicted airports in socialist states as convergence points in the socialist world system, deliberately focusing on shots of airlines from different socialist states. The crew often ran into friends from socialist nations who help them out of difficult situations: in episode three, the crew of a Czechoslovak jet come to the crew’s aid when the plane is grounded by a bird strike during a stop-over in Lagos, while on its way to Luanda to deliver goods—paid for by solidarity donations—to the MPLA.²⁴

Similarly, the concept of “uneven development,” which came into use in the late 1970s to describe the increasingly unreliable nature of those states in the proto-socialist world that were seen to be still under the spell of their former colonial rulers, is well represented in the show. In episode Three the crew’s interactions with Nigerian authorities in Lagos are strained, with Nigerians presented as compromised by neo-colonial rule. After being charged exorbitant medical fees for treatment of an injury

²³ Kevin Hannam, Mimi Sheller, and John Urry, “Editorial: Mobilities, Immobilities and Moorings,” *Mobilities* 1, no. 1 (March 1, 2006): 6.

²⁴ Manfred Mosblech, “Mayday, Mayday,” *Treffpunkt Flughafen* (DDR 1, March 9, 1986).

sustained by a crew member, the plane's captain reminds Paul that "this country has not been independent for long" and that the GDR has no embassy there, meaning it is unlikely that they realise that GDR citizens are different from other white people, who are *Kolonialherren*. Later, a Nigerian soldier confesses his disappointment with independence to the crew: "we thought that with independence, we would also get justice [Gerechtigkeit], but it turned out not to be so easy."²⁵

Episode Eight, in which the plane travels to Nicaragua to pick up wounded Sandinista fighters, emphasised both uneven development and socialist isolation. Upon arrival the crew are immediately thrust into the dangers of an active civil war, visiting a team of GDR doctors in an army camp. The doctors are part of a "flying hospital" and are unfazed by the destruction and numerous wounded fighters, explaining to the crew that they have "done this a few times, in Africa and the Middle East."²⁶ Shortly thereafter, however, the camp is bombed, forcing a rapid evacuation. On the way back home, the rapidly deteriorating health of one of the passengers necessitates an emergency landing. US military manoeuvres in the Atlantic however, mean that the capitalist world was shut to GDR planes: rejected from landing in New York or London, the plane has to make a daring and dangerous journey direct to Berlin through stormy weather.²⁷ In reality, such a journey would have been impossible, of course, and would have involved a stop off in Gander, as we have seen in the previous chapter. This fictional elision of space was a constant theme throughout the series, but in this episode it produces a further, unintentional effect, highlighting the archipelagic nature of socialist sovereignty in the 1980s. As we will see later, this archipelagic nature was also evident in the filming of the series.

²⁵ Mosblech, "Mayday, Mayday."

²⁶ Manfred Mosblech, "Das Tor in Den Wolken," *Treffpunkt Flughafen* (DDR 1, April 6, 1986).

²⁷ Mosblech, "Das Tor in Den Wolken."

Television and Ideology

What does *Treffpunkt Flughafen* tell us about proto-socialism? As a viewing experience, it stands out as a curious combination of grand ideology and everyday entertainment. Its place in the TV offer of the GDR, however, is explicable when situated in a broader understanding of the propagandistic function of socialist television. Socialist TV has long been viewed as a simplistic tool for indoctrination. As Raymond Williams famously asserted, TV is above all a “cultural technology” that can act as a “powerful new form of social integration and control.”²⁸ Such critiques of the political and social implications of TV in the West have led some scholars of socialist TV to condemn emphasis on the political nature of the latter as lacking balance. In her study of GDR TV, Heather Gumbert argues against the GDR’s exceptional status vis-à-vis the West; TV in the GDR, she writes, “operated as a mediator of political, cultural, and social knowledge and power in ways comparable to the Anglo-American context.”²⁹ Allen and Heiduschke make similar claims for cinema, arguing against the notion that it should be viewed as “separate” from the rest of the globe.³⁰

The question of comparison here, however, is not one of degree but of form. Socialist TV might not have been *more* political than capitalist TV, if such calculation were meaningful or indeed possible. But like socialist leisure, socialist TV was *intentionally* political and those who controlled imbued it with explicitly political purposes. Discussing DEFA, Allen and Heiduschke argue that to describe film as a

²⁸ Raymond Williams, *Television: Technology and Cultural Form* (London: Routledge, 2003), 16.

²⁹ Gumbert, *Envisioning Socialism*, 5.

³⁰ Seán Allan and Sebastien Heiduschke, “Introduction,” in *Re-Imagining Defa: East German Cinema in Its National and Transnational Contexts*, ed. Seán Allan and Sebastian Heiduschke (New York: Berghahn Books, 2016).

propaganda tool is reductive, but that is very literally how it was understood, at least by those in charge. Socialist media systems were defined by Leninist notion of agitprop: propaganda explains the “capitalistic nature of crises,” agitation rouses the masses to action.³¹ As Kristin Roth-Ey explains in her history of Soviet TV, the mass-media boom was similar to that in the West, but the socialist ideal of culture was a key differentiating factor; communist culture was elitist and pedagogical because it saw itself as carrying out a spiritual mission of cultural uplift.³² At the same time, it is misleading to speak, as Kochanowski, Trültzsch and Viehoff do, of “political indoctrination.”³³ The goal of socialist TV was, rather, to create independent and ideologically literate socialist subjects.

Treffpunkt Flughafen was certainly envisaged as carrying this mission of cultural uplift. Baked into its often whimsical storylines were serious moral lessons regarding geopolitics and everyday life. But this pedagogical function was combined with a desire to entertain. Indeed, Tobias Hochsherf claims that the *principal* aim of *Treffpunkt Flughafen*'s production was that it would compete with existing Western TV for GDR citizens' attention.³⁴ Although the evidence that the series itself was specifically produced for this reason is scant, it is certainly true that competition with the West was constantly at the forefront of the minds of DFF executives. As Claudia Dittmar reminds us, the history of GDR TV was one “of a continuous battle to retain audience, as a history of conflicts with an ‘enemy’ that the GDR was unable to prevent from infiltrating its

³¹ Vladimir Il'ich Lenin, *What Is to Be Done?* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1988), Chapter 3.

³² Kristin Roth-Ey, *Moscow Prime Time: How the Soviet Union Built the Media Empire That Lost the Cultural Cold War* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2011).

³³ Katja Kochanowski, Sascha Trueltzsch, and Reinhold Viehoff, “An Evening with Friends and Enemies: Political Indoctrination in Popular East German Family Series,” in *Popular Television in Eastern Europe During and Since Socialism*, ed. Timothy Havens and Kati Lustyik (London: Routledge, 2013).

³⁴ Tobias Hochscherf, “Civil Cold War Aviation as Television Drama: The Popular Miniseries *Treffpunkt Flughafen* (GDR 1986),” in *Media and the Cold War in the 1980s: Between Star Wars and Glasnost*, ed. Henrik G. Bastiansen, Martin Klimke, and Rolf Werenskjold (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2019), 87–113.

territory.”³⁵ By the 1980s, 87 percent of GDR citizens could receive the FRG’s ARG network, and by virtue of their proximity the televisual output of the GDR and FRG were drawn into direct comparison.³⁶

Competing with the West did not mean diluting socialist content, however. As Hochsherf correctly points out, *Treffpunkt Flughafen* acts as counterpoint to narratives that see the 1980s as displaying an emptying out of socialist content in GDR TV programming. Such narratives frame the 1980s as, to quote Claudia Dittmar, an era of “an increasing orientation on entertainment, the broadcasting of Western movies, and neglecting GDR TV’s own productions, [resulting] in a loss of its own identity.”³⁷ In contrast, a DFF report from 1985 revealed that expansive genre of “performing arts,” including TV dramas and entertainment shows, took up 47.1 percent of GDR TV in 1984, a total of 3,845 hours. Of these hours 44.6 percent were GDR-produced, ranging from theatre adaptations like *Faust* to family dramas such as *Mench, Oma!* to popular series like *Polizeiruf 101* and entertainment shows like *Ein Kessel Buntes*. 31.5 percent came from socialist nations and 23.9 percent from non-socialist ones.³⁸ As Hochsherf shows, rather than being a simple copy of Western modes of entertainment, *Treffpunkt Flughafen* sought to combine the influence of Western soap opera with highbrow socialist messaging. So, for example, while director Manfred Mosblech and his team travelled to study US films in West Berlin to prepare for the series’ production,³⁹ the DFF’s senior script editor Manfred Seidowsky spoke of the show appealing to younger

³⁵ Claudia Dittmar, “Television and Politics in the Former East Germany,” *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* 7, no. 4 (December 1, 2005): 2.

³⁶ Woo-Seung Lee, *Das Fernsehen im geteilten Deutschland (1952-1989): Ideologische Konkurrenz und programmliche Kooperation* (Potsdam: Verlag für Berlin-Brandenburg, 2003), 32.

³⁷ Claudia Dittmar, “GDR Television in Competition with West German Programming,” *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 24, no. 3 (August 1, 2004): 339.

³⁸ DRA, H023-00-02/0081, “Darstellende Kunst im Fernsehen der DDR,” 1-2.

³⁹ BArch, DR 117/29622 Letter from Selbmann to Beier, 6. 2. 84.

audiences while at the same time reflecting “the international status of the GDR” and “strengthening feelings of solidarity.”⁴⁰

Treffpunkt Flughafen was developed in the run-up to the SED’s eleventh congress, with the explicit aim of producing a “spectacular” moment of programming in preparation for the meeting.⁴¹ DFF planning documents boasted that the series, which had been in production since the spring of 1983, would display “exciting, emotionally rich material revolving around the example of a GDR plane’s crew, the international recognition of the GDR, and the concept of proletarian internationalism.”⁴² By 1985 it was DFF policy to have two to four “exciting, adventurous shows which take the international *Klassenauseinandersetzung* as their background” annually.⁴³ Thus while *Treffpunkt Flughafen* was in some ways an attempt to create a form of entertainment that corresponded with Western modes and diverted attention away from Western Television, it remained explicitly socialist—indeed agitpropagandist—in its orientation.

In this regard the introduction to the DFF’s plan for programming in 1986 is worth quoting. “The second half of the 1980s,” the report writers noted, “will be defined by dynamic development in the socialist society of the GDR...The ideological conflict with the enemy will doubtless sharpen. Increasingly importance will be taken up by the worldwide *Klassenauseinandersetzung* and anti-imperialist struggle...our great responsibility in 1986 is to make sure that we are a powerful instrument for the party, that we cater daily for the millions of GDR citizens’ expectations and demands.”⁴⁴ In a report to the SED district administration for TV in late 1984, *Treffpunkt Flughafen* was listed among a slew of new series that fulfil a general need to “deal with the conflicts of

⁴⁰ Hochscherf, “Civil Cold War Aviation as Television Drama.”

⁴¹ BArch, DR 8/185 “Vorgabe für den Plan 1985/86,” 21.

⁴² *ibid.*, 35.

⁴³ BArch, DR 8/186 “Vorgabe für den Plan 1986,” 7.

⁴⁴ *ibid.*, 1-2

our time,” a need that was stronger than ever despite the fact that “socialism is stronger than ever before, and increasingly sets the decisive preconditions for global peace.”⁴⁵

What precisely did air travel have to do, however, with anti-imperialist struggle? As a practice, of course, it was not a normal experience for GDR citizens. The GDR is remembered today above all for its citizen’s immobility. As Kathy Burrell and Kathrin Hörschelmann have argued, the growth of mobility as an object of study has failed to challenge significantly a stock distinction between static socialist societies and a hypermobile capitalist West.⁴⁶ Were series such as *Treffpunkt Flughafen* and *Zur See* intended to create opportunities for what John Urry has called “imaginative travel,” to act as a replacement for real opportunities?⁴⁷ Certainly many scholars have seen Interflug’s importance as lying primarily on a symbolic level. Route maps listed a wide range of potential destinations such as Havana, Maputo, Cairo, Hanoi and Damascus, and Annette Vowinckel has claimed that these were empty shell routes, displayed “to prove commitment to international standards.”⁴⁸

For GDR citizens, however, the state’s penchant for *symbolic* depictions of mobility would not have been surprising. Indeed, mobility was a key feature of state propaganda. The *Haus des Reisens* in Berlin Alexanderplatz was completed in a modernist style in

⁴⁵ SAPMO-BArch, DY 30/498, “Bericht des Sekretariats an die 2. Tagung der Kreisleitung über die Arbeit seit der Kreisdelegiertenkonferenz und die weiteren Aufgaben zum 35. Jahrestag der DDR,” 10.

⁴⁶ Kathy Burrell and Kathrin Hörschelmann, eds., *Mobilities in Socialist and Post-Socialist States: Societies on the Move* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014); See also a special edition of East European Politics and Societies: Patryk Babiracki, Kenyon Zimmer, and Michael David-Fox, *Cold War Crossings: International Travel and Exchange across the Soviet Bloc, 1940s-1960s* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2014); On rise of mobility as an object of study, see important texts by Castells, Cresswell and Urry. Manuel Castells, *The Rise of the Network Society: Information Age: Economy, Society, and Culture v. 1* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009); Tim Cresswell, *On the Move: Mobility in the Modern Western World* (New York: Routledge, 2006); John Urry, *Mobilities* (London: Polity, 2007).

⁴⁷ Urry, *Mobilities*, 169.

⁴⁸ Annette Vowinckel, “Flying Away: Civil Aviation and the Dream of Freedom in East and West,” in *Divided Dreamworlds?: The Cultural Cold War in East and West*, ed. Peter Romijn, Giles Scott-Smith, and Joes Segal, Studies of the Netherlands Institute for War Documentation ; 5. (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2012), 189.

1971 and housed the Berlin *Reisebüro* office as well Interflug. The building was embellished with a copper relief work by GDR sculptor Walter Womacka that is a sort of transhistorical ode to the triumph of mobility—a compass, a ship's wheel, and a cosmonaut overlay stormy seas and depictions of planets. The title of the sculpture—*der Mensch überwindet Zeit und Raum* (“Humanity conquers time and space”) is instructive of its purpose; the leaders of the GDR, at least, sought to portray the state as an active agent in part of the compression of time and space so often associated with globalised, late modernity. As Vowinckel has argued, flying remained a “shared metaphor for freedom and progress” in the East just as it did in the West, and both sides of the divide constructed remarkably similar so-called “dreamworlds” of aviation.⁴⁹

The crew in *Treffpunkt Flughafen* were depicted flying both freight and passengers. The use of Interflug aircraft to transport aid was a reflection of a real practice. In fact, *Treffpunkt Flughafen* first screened just a year after what was probably the most widely published case of GDR aerial-based aid, in Ethiopia. GDR viewers would already have been familiar with this practice a year before *Treffpunkt Flughafen* first aired, since a popular documentary, *DDR-Flieger in Äthiopien*, had covered the activities of GDR planes in the Horn of Africa; the documentary was later listed as one of the most popular of its time.⁵⁰

Depicting the Proto-Socialist World on Screen: A Short History

⁴⁹ Annette Vowinckel, “Flying Away: Civil Aviation and the Dream of Freedom in East and West,” in *Divided Dreamworlds?: The Cultural Cold War in East and West*, ed. Peter Romijn, Giles Scott-Smith, and Joes Segal (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2012), 5–6.

⁵⁰ BArch, DR 8/187, “Adlershofer Videothek,” 2.

The making of *Treffpunkt Flughafen* was, in a way, the conclusion to a question that had plagued GDR TV for the decades that preceded it: how was the proto-socialist world to be brought to life in the everyday world of GDR citizens? In this broader context, as we will see, *Treffpunkt Flughafen's* combination of entertainment and ideology was typical, but it bucked a long-established trend for realism and factual programming when it came to depicting the proto-socialist world. This focus on realism was the product of both the subject matter and televisual ideology. Since the socialist world system and the anti-imperialist nature of the countries of the proto-socialist world were seen by the leaders of the GDR as objective facts, it would seem logical to present this reality through the medium of factual programming. In any case, as Aniko Imre has noted, “realism was the preferred aesthetic delivery channel” of Marxism-Leninism.⁵¹ TV in the socialist world was supposed to depict *both* dreams and reality: depicting life as is, as well as how it would be.

This focus was a key distinguishing feature of socialist TV, which was probably the only form of mass media which socialist regimes didn't inherit as an already established form. As Agitprop chief Werner Lamberz would later recognise, in the early period, TV in the GDR was essentially fumbling in the dark: “for other mediums we had either considerable or at least partial direct experience: revolutionary workers' press, workers radio clubs, revolutionary film and theatre. And naturally, we also inherited in these cases the legacy of bourgeois practices, although in some cases this only gave us clear knowledge of how *not* to do things.”⁵²

Early GDR TV boasted a wide array of factual programming. As Allan and Heiduschke note, documentaries about Chile or Vietnam could strengthen international links while helping to convince GDR citizens of their state's global significance.⁵³ Indeed, it was this form of programming that is often held to be

⁵¹ Anikó Imre, *TV Socialism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press Books, 2016), 29.

⁵² SAPMO-BArch, DY 30/477, “Schlusswort des Genossen Werner Lamberz,” 7.

⁵³ Allan and Heiduschke, “Introduction,” 8.

archetypal. In the film *Goodbye Lenin!*, one of the most important popular fictional accounts of the GDR post-*Wende*, the lead character creates a fictional television address in the style of a party announcement in order to convince his mother that the defunct GDR continued to exist; normality in the GDR thus being read as dry, explicitly political programming.⁵⁴

From the late 1950s to the late 1960s, this archetype largely rings true. As Heather Gumbert has shown, the state broadcaster in the GDR, the *Deutscher Fernsehfunf*, DFF, had been chastised by the Politbüro for being outflanked and outpaced by Western news agencies in their coverage of the Hungarian uprising in 1956. From the late 1950s onwards, then, there was an increased focus on “current-political” (*aktuell-politisch*) programming, with a particular focus on anti-imperialist struggle in the Africa and the Middle East.⁵⁵ This domestic development combined with events worldwide, where decolonisation and the increasing momentum of various forms of national liberation were attracting the attention of the socialist state. As we have seen, decolonisation in the 1960s and the “year of Africa” which saw the breakup of the European empires; the subsequent breakup of the Portuguese empire in the mid-1970s and the emergence of Marxist-Leninist movements in the states that took its place; the struggle and eventual success of anti-apartheid movements in Southern Africa in the 1980s were all seen by the SED as vital opportunities for the GDR to break its international isolation. Already by 1958, the DFF were demanding that TV raise awareness among the GDR population regarding “fraternal socialist countries.”⁵⁶ This would only grow as the proto-socialist world took on increased importance for the GDR throughout the 1960s.

⁵⁴ Roger F. Cook, “Good Bye, Lenin!: Free-Market Nostalgia for Socialist Consumerism,” *Seminar: A Journal of Germanic Studies* 43, no. 2 (2007): 211.

⁵⁵ Gumbert, *Envisioning Socialism*, 78.

⁵⁶ Gumbert, 142.

How were these events to be mediated to GDR citizens? Factual programming in the GDR was designed to be explicitly pedagogical, and specially-written viewer questionnaires were sent to citizens to gauge the success of any given day's programming. The questions in these questionnaires are revealing in their lack of subtlety. To take one example, an immediate response form [Sofortresonanz] from November 1968 asked viewers for their opinions of *Novemberrevolution*, a documentary made especially for the 50th anniversary of the failed Spartacist uprising in Berlin. Alongside the more practical question of whether viewers thought historic events should be dealt with on TV "in reference to the present, or shown purely as history," the questionnaire asked whether "following the program, viewers could explain why the November 1918 Revolution failed?"⁵⁷ Viewers were asked to give written answers which were assessed by research staff. In response, 35.8 percent gave no answer, 5 percent were deemed to have given the wrong answer, and 59.2 percent "gave an answer corresponding to the truth of the situation," the most popular of these being "disunity among the working classes," and the second "the betrayal of the right-wing SPD leadership."⁵⁸

This directly pedagogical approach proved ineffective. It is a central claim of GDR historiography that from the late 1960s onward, GDR TV moved toward a focus on entertainment as a direct result of inter-German competition. Trützsch and Viethoff claim that entertainment became an important propagandistic tool in the GDR television landscape, as information and news based programming failed to have the desired propagandistic effect.⁵⁹ Michael Meyen's study of GDR TV made similar findings via both interviews and contemporary viewer research.⁶⁰ Claudia Dittmar traces

⁵⁷ BArch, DR 8/315, "Ergebnisse der 21. Sofortresonanz vom 8. November 1968," 3.

⁵⁸ *ibid.*

⁵⁹ Sascha Trützsch and Reinhold Viehoff, "Undercover: How the East German Political System Presented Itself in Television Series," in *Popular Television in Authoritarian Europe*, ed. Peter Goddard (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013), 142; Carol Anne Costabile-Heming makes the same claim. See Carol Anne Costabile-Heming, "'Rezensor': A Case Study of Censorship and Programmatic Reception in the GDR," *Monatshefte* 92, no. 1 (2000): 54.

⁶⁰ Meyen, *Einschalten, Umschalten, Ausschalten?*, 80.

this shift to the late 1960s and early 1970s, as does Heather Gumbert, citing a commonly quoted Honecker speech in 1971 which exhorted programmers to overcome a “certain boredom” among GDR viewers.⁶¹ As percentages of weekly programming, shows fitting the genre of entertainment remained stable, slightly decreasing from 16 to 13 percent from 1955 to 1985. TV Drama however, was more fluid, at roughly 46 percent in 1955 dropping to 18 percent in 1965 and then jumping to 28 percent where it remained stable in 1975.⁶² As structural analysis from Sasha Trültzsch and Uwe Breitenborn has shown, the GDR TV program, in terms of genre-share, corresponded similarly to other countries, including the FRG, by the 1970s.⁶³

The shift to entertainment, however, didn't necessarily mean jettisoning political education. Gameshows were one genre that began to be imbued with explicitly geopolitical messages from the late 1960s onwards. *Schlager einer großen Stadt* (Highlights from a Big City, 1968–1971) and *Im Quizquartett durch unsere Welt* (Through our World in a Quiz Quartet, 1968–1969) both appeared at the turn of the 1970s and sought to showcase the GDR's transnational links. In the former presenter Heinz Florian Oertel travelled to socialist cities and presented landmarks while also highlighting their links to the GDR, and the latter was a quiz show in which four competitors, hailing from the Eastern Bloc as well as proto-socialist nations such as Egypt, answered travel-based questions about socialist holiday destinations.⁶⁴ Between

⁶¹ Gumbert, *Envisioning Socialism*, 161.

⁶² Jörg U. Fischer, *Das Schriftgut des DDR-Fernsehens: Eine Bestandsübersicht* (Frankfurt: Stiftung Deutsches Rundfunkarchiv, 2001), 17–18.

⁶³ Sasha Trültzsch and Uwe Breitenborn, “Program Structure Analysis of the GDR Television 1956 to 1991,” *Siegener Periodicum zur internationalen empirischen Literaturwissenschaft* 25, no. 2 (2006): 266.

⁶⁴ Here, I am assuming that when Wolfgang Mühl-Benninghaus claims that candidates for the show came from the United Arab Emirates (UAE), he has confused the UAE with the United Arab Republic (UAR), originally a short-lived union between Egypt (including the occupied Gaza Strip) and Syria formed in 1958. While Syria left the union in 1961, Egypt continued to be known officially as the UAR until 1971. The UAE was not formed until the same year, after the show had stopped broadcasting. Wolfgang Mühl-Benninghaus, *Unterhaltung als Eigensinn: Eine ostdeutsche Mediengeschichte* (Frankfurt: Campus Verlag, 2012), 270.

1973 and 1974 the DFF also featured *Gemeinsam macht's Spaß* (Together it's Fun), a socialist world system-based gameshow. DFF's outline proposal for the show is worth quoting at length for an insight into how deeply notions of international cooperation penetrated entertainment television in the GDR:

In synchronisation with societal development in the GDR, which is becoming an important component of the socialist community of states, it is recommended that an entertainment program is developed which concentrates on concepts of integration.

Featuring members of the public, *Gemeinsam macht's Spaß* is an entertainment program which utilises the possibilities for entertainment provided by competitions, games and music, tension and emotion, etc. As a platform for societal processes of integration, this project should have an effect among the masses, increasing international socialist cooperation and raising consciousness (*bewußtsein bilden*) in this area. The program will experientially and clearly centre the successes of socialist integration in a relatable and emotional manner. In the process it will show the collective thinking, collective leadership, collective doing, collective joy and collective irritations of co-operation and cohabitation.⁶⁵

As we have seen elsewhere, visions of integration and international co-operation in the GDR were limited to those nations perceived of as “safe.” *Sofortresonanzen* often picked up criticisms regarding GDR television's selectivity in this regard. One, from January 1969, noted that three different responses had demanded that *Aktuelle Kamera*—which focused on the socialist and proto-socialist world—showed more reports from “all of the world,” the clear implication and emphasis on the word “all” suggesting that what was really meant was the West.⁶⁶ In 1972 one viewer from Karl-Marx-Stadt responded to a DFF viewers forum with a complaint about “one-sided information” regarding plane crashes; in October of that year an Aeroflot plane had crashed outside

⁶⁵ BArch, DR 8/131, “Gemeinsam macht's Spaß” 1.

⁶⁶ BArch, DR 8/131, “Ergebnisse der 2. (26.) Sofortresonanz vom 25. 1. 1969,” Anhang, 1.

Moscow killing all 164 passengers and ten crew, at the time the deadliest plane crash to date. The viewer argued that GDR media had only covered the story with a few “shallow reports” in contrast extensive coverage of similar incidents in the capitalist world. “I am of the opinion,” the viewer explained, “that aircraft catastrophes are independent from the societal order in which they take place, and therefore there is no need to attempt to hide them.”⁶⁷

Throughout the 1970s, the GDR’s factual programming regarding the proto-socialist world declined in popularity. Perhaps the most prominent figure in this world was Ulrich Makosch, who presented the foreign affairs program, *Objektiv* from the late 1960s onward and presided over a slump in the show’s viewership, from an average of 20.9 percent in 1968 to 8.2 percent in 1972.⁶⁸ Given international events, one might have expected a growth in audience, but instead viewership declined throughout the decade, continuing on a steady decline into the 1980s.⁶⁹ Of additional concern was that viewership seemed restricted to “true believers,” with reports noting that viewership was much higher among SED members.⁷⁰

With the failure of factual programming, then, the SED had to turn to other instruments if TV was to have its desired pedagogical effect. The main terrain upon which the GDR had to compete with the FRG, as Heather Gumbert has argued, was in the field of entertainment.⁷¹ As we have seen, GDR TV did this remarkably successfully. A spine of regular popular shows frequently drew East German viewers from their West German rivals. In the 1980s sport screening, the weekly variety show *Ein Kessel Buntes*,

⁶⁷ BAArch, DR 8/377 “Bericht über Aussprechen von Mitarbeitern des DDR-Fernsehens mit der Bevölkerung in Monat November 1972,” 17.

⁶⁸ DRA, H074-00-02-0082, “Einige Ergebnisse zu Objektiv”, 4. July 1972, 1.

⁶⁹ Klaus Behling, *Fernsehen aus Adlershof: Das Fernsehen der DDR vom Start bis zum Sendeschluss* (Berlin: Edition Berolina, 2016), 57.

⁷⁰ DRA, H074-00-02-0082, “Einige Ergebnisse zu Objektiv”, 2.

⁷¹ Gumbert, *Envisioning Socialism*, 158.

and *Tele-Lotto*, the lottery draw which doubled as a game show, frequently drew over 30 percent of viewers.⁷²

Treffpunkt Flughafen would continue this success, proving popular with GDR audiences. This success was not always guaranteed. The show's focus on air travel had been considered a substantial risk by DFF executives. Specifically, actor Jürgen Zartmann would later claim that there had been huge concerns surrounding audiences' reactions to the show: "from the beginning, the people 'at the top' were concerned that the show would create a yearning on the part of the population...that distant travel, flying wherever on wants, everything we can do now but couldn't then. They feared that people would take to the barricades because we could do that and they couldn't."⁷³ Weekly audience research reports frequently listed it as one of the best performing shows in the GDR, however.⁷⁴ The first two episodes were watched by 35.3 percent and 39.9 percent percent of viewers respectively, and the following six episodes all saw viewer ratings of over 50 percent bar the sixth, which achieved a rating of 43.7 percent. The most popular episode, Episode Seven, which took place in Nicaragua, was watched by close to 60 percent of viewers.⁷⁵

Internal assessments from the DFF were generally positive, often recognising the desired links between entertainment and propaganda, exoticism and politics. Staff praised the program for offering a "breath of the exotic," for example, thereby "offering entertainment for a wide viewership."⁷⁶ "Themes of international solidarity," wrote another DFF worker, "were complimented by exotic landscapes and attractive shots."⁷⁷ Viewers similarly seemed to enjoy this mix. A specifically commissioned DFF study

⁷² See viewer research in DRA, H023-00-02-0107.

⁷³ "Weite Ferne Und Fliegen Wohin Man Will."

⁷⁴ See, for example, weekly reports in DRA, H023-00-02-0120.

⁷⁵ DRA, H023-00-02-0120, "Bericht der 15. Programmwoche vom 07.04-13.04.198," 4.

⁷⁶ DRA, H023-00-02-0120, "Ergebnisse und Einschätzungen der Sendungen vom 11. - 18. 03. 1986," 6.

⁷⁷ DRA, H023-00-02-0120, "Bericht der 14. Programmwoche vom 31. 03. - 06. 04. 1985," 11.

found that two thirds of viewers who had seen at least one episode saw the show as “interesting and entertaining.” Almost half were “of the opinion that the relationships in the Interflug collective are comparable to those in the working collectives of our land,” according to the report, while 45 percent enjoyed “seeing the appealing scenes filmed in foreign countries.”⁷⁸

Filming in the Socialist Archipelago: The Making of *Treffpunkt Flughafen*

What does the making *Treffpunkt Flughafen* tell us about proto-socialism in the 1980s? The series was officially coproduced with the Cuban state broadcasting network ICRT, who received broadcasting rights for America.⁷⁹ It is unclear if, and how, the show was eventually televised abroad. But while the series—like tourism to Cuba—sought to demonstrate an objective sense of unity between GDR citizens and their compatriots in the proto-socialist world, it was very clearly aimed exclusively at GDR citizens. Indeed, the co-production tag disguised the fact that the show was in reality a GDR production that used Cuba as a shooting location; the ICRT played no role in the script production or the show’s conception. A Cuban actor, Reinaldo Cruz, was drafted to play crew member Santiago Cordoba, and a Cuban crew helped out on-site. Beyond that, there is scant evidence of Cuban input. The crew also featured a Vietnamese character, Li. Mosblech had travelled to Hanoi in 1983 to cast a Vietnamese actor in the role, but had failed to find a suitable candidate.⁸⁰ Li was eventually played by Tam Pham Thi Thanh Pham, a Vietnamese Interflug flight attendant, released from her contract in order to

⁷⁸ Christoph Wowtscherk, *Was wird, wenn die Zeitbombe hochgeht?: Eine sozialgeschichtliche Analyse der fremdenfeindlichen Ausschreitungen in Hoyerswerda im September 1991* (Göttingen: V&R unipress, 2014), 119–61, 243–49.

⁷⁹ Hochscherf, 95.

⁸⁰ BArch, DR 117/29622, “Aktenotiz: Besetzung der Rolle ‘Li’ mit einer Vietnamesin,” 1.

play the role.⁸¹ In a short dialogue on the series produced for its release on DVD in 2010, actors Marijam Agischewa and Jürgen Zartmann noted that Pham went back to work as an flight attendant after filming.⁸²

As with cruises to Cuba, the idea of an integrated socialist and proto-socialist world rubbed awkwardly against the reality of transnational socialist practice. Bringing the GDR and the proto-socialist world together on screen proved a logistical and practical challenge, highlighting the archipelagic nature of socialist globalization and belying its claims to unity. Depicting the foreign had been a consistent problem for GDR TV productions. In 1957, the then head of the DFF told staff to take photos when they travelled abroad, for use as file images.⁸³ In general, of course, depicting flight was a technical and practical challenge for organisations like DEFA and DFF, who were struggling by the 1980s with a lack of resources, convertible currency, and international networks of expertise. For cockpit scenes, for example, a mock-up had to be built that facilitated multiple cameras, and was deemed realistic enough for Interflug to use after filming for pilot training.⁸⁴ Interflug staff led the cast on a week-long training course, and the actors playing flight attendants completed Interflug flight attendant training.⁸⁵

Footage of Cuba taken from planes had to be obtained from the ICRT.⁸⁶ A meeting between Mosblech and Klaus Henkes, the Director General of Interflug, revealed both this limitation and a general lack of knowledge regarding conditions in the states in which the series was to be filmed. Mosblech noted a need for “dramatologically necessary cut scenes and some sequences from Africa, as well as information regarding the countries, how the people live, etc,” complaining that when filming in Cuba this information was

⁸¹ BArch, DR 117/29622, Letter from Sonnabend to Grimmer, 19.12. 1984.

⁸² “Weite Ferne Und Fliegen Wohin Man Will.”

⁸³ Gumbert, *Envisioning Socialism*, 68.

⁸⁴ BArch, DR 117/29622, Letter from Glaser to Sonnabend, 2. 12. 1985.

⁸⁵ BArch, DR 117/29622, “Gesprächsprotokoll über ein Gespräch mit den Generaldirektor Henkes am 13. 9. 1983,” 1.

⁸⁶ BArch, DR 117/29622, Letter from Sonnabend to Michel, 14. 10. 1985.

lacking, leading to them staging scenes in the country like “blind chickens.” Mosblech suggested that a film crew travel to Luanda or Maputo on a freight flight in order to carry this out, only to be told that this wasn’t possible because, in the words of Henkes, “there are wars there.” Henkes’ solution was to suggest filming in Zimbabwe.⁸⁷ Even as a compromise, the Zimbabwe plan was eventually shelved due to a lack of convertible currency.⁸⁸

In particular, producer Martin Sonnabend’s correspondence highlights the contrast between the global image cast by the show and the realities of depicting the global within the limitations of the GDR. Vital crew members were denied visas.⁸⁹ A scene in which a Nigerian soldier shares papaya with the plane’s Captain had to be filmed in Berlin, using fruit especially imported from West Berlin.⁹⁰ Ambitious plans to film in various locations across the globe had to be shelved. Plans to film scenes in Nicaragua, for example, proved impossible. Upon hearing the news, an angry Sonnabend wrote to the deputy chairman of the State Television Committee Erich Selbmann demanding that a small team be allowed to travel to Nicaragua in order to familiarise themselves with the country at least. Suggestions that the Cubans might cover the cost of filming in Nicaragua were rejected by Sonnabend on the basis that he didn’t believe “the Cubans have any more dollars than we do.”⁹¹ Similar plans to film in Ethiopia were also shelved,⁹² as were plans to film in Luanda, again due to a lack of convertible currency.⁹³ In the end the only

⁸⁷ BArch, DR 117/29622, “Gesprächsprotokoll über ein Gespräch mit den Generaldirektor Henkes am 13. 9. 1983,” 2.

⁸⁸ BArch, DR 117/29622 “FS-Film *Treffpunkt Flughafen*,” 1.

⁸⁹ BArch, DR 117/29622, Letter from Sonnabend to Kirst, 26.2. 1985.

⁹⁰ BArch, DR 117/29622, Letter from Sonnabend to Bereich Dramatische Kunst, 1.8. 1984.

⁹¹ BArch, DR 117/29622, Letter from Sonnabend to Selbmann 14. 02. 1984.

⁹² BArch, DR 117/29622, Letter from Sonnabend to Burmester, 17. 7. 84.

⁹³ BArch, DR 117/29622, “FS-Film *Treffpunkt Flughafen*,” 1.

on-location filming (aside from stock footage) was carried out in the Soviet Union, Cuba, Vietnam, and the GDR.⁹⁴

In 1985 a group of 35 cast and crew spent four months filming in Cuba.⁹⁵ The actors were put up in a holiday home in Santa Maria.⁹⁶ Interflug regularly flew German newspapers and food to the crew during their sojourn. As Marijam Agischewa would later remember, this was a time of “shortage” and a lack of foreign currency, which meant that everything was rationed; actors lived mostly on tinned goods sent from the GDR, including the infamous *Dosenbrot*, or canned bread.⁹⁷ The deliveries were also for the comfort of the crew too: as Sonnabend wrote later, the deliveries made “an exceptional, demanding period significantly easier.”⁹⁸

Conclusion

The popularity of *Treffpunkt Flughafen* led to a follow up miniseries, *Flugstaffel Meinecke* (Flight Squadron Meinecke, 1990) which eschewed the international adventures of *Treffpunkt Flughafen* in favour of the less thrilling escapades of a squadron of agricultural aircraft based within the GDR.⁹⁹ By 1989, of course, faith in the prospects for the proto-socialist world were rapidly fading, and although the turn inward to domestic agricultural flying was probably driven by other concerns, it seems an apt metaphor for the death of the dreams that motivated the production of *Treffpunkt Flughafen*.

⁹⁴ See production plan in DR 117/28439.

⁹⁵ BArch, DR 117/29622, “Klärung nachstehender Fragen und Probleme, deren Beantwortung und Lösung für die weiteren Arbeiten äußerst wichtig sind,” 1.

⁹⁶ “Weite Ferne Und Fliegen Wohin Man Will.”

⁹⁷ “Weite Ferne Und Fliegen Wohin Man Will.”

⁹⁸ BArch, DR 117/29622, Letter from Sonnabend to Zube, 19. 12. 1984.

⁹⁹ Hochscherf, “Civil Cold War Aviation as Television Drama,” 108.

As a dramatization of proto-socialism, *Treffpunkt Flughafen* provides a meaningful insight into the global visions produced in the GDR and their importance for even the most everyday forms of culture and entertainment. It is difficult to parse the success of the show with its intended propagandist function: were viewers finding opportunities for “imaginative travel,” or enthralled by *Treffpunkt Flughafen’s* combination of developmentalist historical references and light-hearted depictions of romance and heartbreak? Such questions of course, emanate more broadly across the spectrum of state-run audience research in the GDR. *Treffpunkt Flughafen*, alongside high viewership ratings, received positive scores from those questioned by the DFF regarding its quality. In general, the DFF seemed to register a lot of support from GDR audiences for depictions of the foreign. Was it true, for example, that citizens in Zeitz told DFF researchers during an audience forum that there was too little foreign reporting journalism in the GDR, or that they requested that time allocated for advertising should be instead used for political reporting, particularly from foreign countries?¹⁰⁰ The historiography of GDR TV, with its emphasis on the rising importance of entertainment as a response to audience demand, would suggest not. But what is clear, however, is that world-historical ideas regarding the proto-socialist world, so important to the GDR’s leaders and international relations experts, percolated deeply into even the most everyday of cultural forms.

Treffpunkt Flughafen was one of the myriad means by which proto-socialism found its way into GDR homes, workplaces and leisure practices. It was shared sovereignty writ large on television screens, realised through the travails of a plucky, multinational jet collective who travelled the globe and encountered imperialism, proto-socialism, allies and foes. Within the agitpropagandist’s “ideological orchestra,” entertainment TV promised the opportunity to elide the political, cultural and geographic distance that hampered socialist globalization. By inserting such themes into popular television, the

¹⁰⁰ SAPMO-BArch, DaR 8/377, “Bericht über Aussprechen von Mitarbeitern des DDR-Fernsehens mit der Bevölkerung in Monat November 1972,” 3.

GDR's own sovereignty would be enhanced, turning viewers away from the enemy in the front room: FRG TV. In producing such a show, the GDR's own vision of socialist globalization was put into practice; co-produced and filmed on location in the proto-socialist world. But the realities of this co-operation belied the status of socialist globalization by the mid-1980s, plagued by a culture of superiority which could not help but depict the proto-socialist world as intrinsically different, increasingly hamstrung by the archipelagic nature of global socialist sovereignty. In 1989 *Treffpunkt Flughafen's* follow-up show would return to the focus to a more domestic setting, matching political events that year, as the proto-socialist world that was dreamt up as a tonic for the GDR's ills was lost in the state's dissolution.

Conclusion

Helga Königsdorf, author, physicist, and member of the GDR Academy of Sciences, was one of the most perceptive commentators on the decline of the GDR and the *Utopieverlust* that accompanied it. A committed socialist, she published widely during the *Wende*, resolving to discover the “opportunity” in the GDR’s collapse.¹ Writing in the face of the GDR’s impending disappearance in 1990, Königsdorf spoke pessimistically, however, of the global future:

Underdevelopment and poverty will sharpen. The world population will grow to eight billion by 2020. This growth will come above all from developing countries, particularly from their urban centres, in which all their problems are concentrated. The world economy is structured in a way that the rich countries will grow increasingly rich while the poor will grow poorer. Their debt-burdens and the environmental problems which affect them the most will grow. The risks which today play a role will only become tangible when it is already too late. Fear and resistance too, often come late. Deed and effect arrive at different points, becoming generational problems in the process.²

¹ See her collected speeches during this era entitled “turning dilemma into opportunity” Helga Königsdorf, *Aus dem Dilemma eine Chance machen. Reden und Aufsätze* (Hamburg: Luchterhand, 1991).

² Helga Königsdorf, “Menschenwürde ist angesagt,” in *Träumen verboten: aktuelle Stellungnahmen aus der DDR*, ed. Peter Neumann (Göttingen: Lamuv, 1990), 11-12.

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Such pessimism was typical of “true believers” during and shortly after the *Wende*. The proto-socialist world had travelled a long way from the potential saviour of the GDR’s tethered sovereignty in the 1960s, to a source of danger, unrest, and contamination in the 1980s. In the latter decade the idea that the proto-socialist world could act as the GDR’s “way out” of its sovereign bind, as Christiane Zehl Romero has argued, took on a melancholy literary as a topos: “Africa, which, along with India, had been a symbolic locus for utopian hopes—originally clearly socialist, later more diffuse—for dreams of escaping a gray, over-industrialized and oppressive (GDR) reality.”³ As the geopolitical idea faded, the proto-socialist world took on a melancholic, individualistic form, a space where one could retreat in the face of lost utopian ideals in order to find reconciliation. Königsdorf herself wrote a novel in which the first-person narrator takes refuge from the *Wende* on a “banana plantation on an island off the coast of Africa,” with the continent standing for “the attempt to rescue whatever remains of utopia and the future.”⁴ Emblematic of this process was Volker Braun’s poem *das innerste Afrika*, in which retreat to an “innermost Africa” acts as a synonym for a return to political authenticity, a space where “Under the soft tamarisks / Into the tropical rains that wash / The slogans off, the dry memoranda.”⁵

This thesis has sought to highlight the importance of the extra-European world to elite thinking and everyday life in the GDR. GDR elites had always seen their state as bearing a “tethered” sovereignty; as a rump state cut off from Western Europe that needed to forge alternative linkages in order to allow the capacity for action required to build socialism. Relations with the rest of the Eastern bloc were never easy, nor was

³ Christiane Zehl Romero, “In the Shadow of the Rainbow: On Christoph Hein’s Exekution Eines Kalbes and Christa Wolf’s Auf Dem Weg Nach Tabou,” in *Changing Identities in East Germany: Selected Papers from the Nineteenth and Twentieth New Hampshire Symposia*, ed. Margy Gerber and Roger Woods (Lanham: University Press of America, 1996), 78.

⁴ Gisela Shaw, “Four Women Writers’ Responses to the Demise of the GDR,” in *Politics and Culture in Twentieth-Century Germany*, ed. James Jordan and William Niven (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2003), 173.

⁵ Volker Braun, *Rubble Flora: Selected Poems*, trans. Karen J. Leeder and David Constantine (Calcutta: Seagull Books, 2014), 17.

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over-reliance on the Soviet Union comfortable. For the first decade of the GDR's existence the solution to this crisis of sovereignty was found in the dream of a united, socialist Germany. But this idea receded rather quickly. By the end of the 1950s, Ulbricht was pushing the Soviets to end the dream and make the German division concrete, a demand that would be made reality by the end of the 1960s.

Coinciding with the loss of faith in a united socialist Germany was the shock of decolonisation in Africa. The French, British and Belgian empires crumbled just as the last socialist attempt to secure a united Germany failed: a ready-made alternative to a united socialist Europe was coming into sight. The new postcolonial states were viewed as bearing objectively defined sympathies with the socialist world. They would thus help the GDR out of isolation, eventually "encircling" the capitalist world with the rest of the socialist world system. While Africa dominated concerns in the early 1960s, the notion of a proto-socialist world eventually came to incorporate Latin America, Africa, and Asia; institutions that were set up to help in this orientation often beginning with Africa as their focus and then spiralling out over time to include the other nations in the so-called tri-continent. At different junctures of the Cold War different states came to occupy important roles within the GDR's proto-socialist imaginary: the postcolonial states of Africa in the early 1960s; the socialist-influenced Ba'athist Arab republics in the late 1960s and early 1970s; the Marxist-Leninist inspired parties of the former Portuguese colonies of Africa in the mid-1970s; the revolutionary, anti-imperialist socialism of the Sandinistas in Nicaragua and the New Jewel Movement in Grenada during the 1980s.

This spread of the concept of the proto-socialism across the globe was enabled by Marxism-Leninist ideology. Leninism provided both the principle: that all societies could develop socialism regardless of development stage; and the imperative: that vanguardist parties have a duty to step in and enforce this shift whenever possible. It also predicted that imperialism, as the highest and last stage of capitalism, was a "colossus with feet of clay"; its collapse was inevitable and imminent. Thus GDR elites, compelled

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by a perceived need for pooled sovereignty and frustrated at their failure to create a socialist Europe, easily and rapidly turned toward the rest of the world, espousing its socialist credentials. As the “fix” moved from a united Germany away to different parts of the globe, it affected different walks of life. The GDR began to try to develop strong bonds with trade unionists from the proto-socialist world; solidarity donations moved from West Germans to Africans and Vietnamese; GDR citizens started to travel to Cuba instead of Europe. This orientation, as we saw in the final chapter, remained deeply embedded in GDR culture in the 1980s.

Where and when was proto-socialism undone? Although the general narrative here is one of decline, it is important to be wary of teleology: the GDR’s turn to proto-socialism did not follow a flat downward trajectory but rather rose and fell with the vicissitudes of the global Cold War. Arising in response to the decolonisation of Africa and the end of the Berlin Crisis, the turn to the proto-socialist world began in the late 1950s and slowly took shape throughout the 1960s. Hopes that were raised by decolonisation were slowly dampened throughout the decade, however, for several reasons. One of these was the ongoing success of the Hallstein doctrine, which managed to successfully perpetuate the GDR’s diplomatic isolation until the early 1970s. The GDR’s travails in attempting to obtain recognition from the newly independent states also tempered hopes regarding their anti-imperialist nature. Fears regarding the efficacy of neo-colonialism, conversely, proved well founded, with prominent GDR politicians expressing disappointment at the rates of growth of trade between the GDR and the extra-European world. This lack of growth was put down to continuing ties to European metropolises.

Things changed drastically in the 1970s, when signing of inter-German Basic Treaty allowed for entrance to the UN and a spate of recognitions. By the middle of the decade this combined with the political atmosphere of détente, communist victory in Vietnam and the growth of military-led Marxist-Leninist revolutions in the proto-socialist world to create new hope in the prospects of global socialism. A short period, running from

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the GDR's admittance to the United Nations in 1973 to the establishment of the Mittag Commission in 1977, ranked as the high point of the proto-socialist turn, and it was in these years that this orientation was at its most successful and had the most profound effect on GDR society. This moment was short lived, however. Although the doctrine wasn't truly abandoned until the late 1980s, it clearly shifted in form in the late 1970s. The Mittag Commission, which proposed reforming relations with proto-socialist nations in order to help resolve the GDR's balance of payments crisis, is a key piece of evidence for this. A concurrent debt crisis also created damaging effects in the extra-European world, creating instability and denting hopes that this world would act as a source of strength for socialism. Throughout the 1980s the very idea of proto-socialism was abandoned, and while the GDR clung on to the alliances it had forged in the preceding years, the idea that the extra-European world was on a path toward socialism receded.

Seeing the turn to the proto-socialist world as a political project embedded in a global-historical context involves analysing how it changed over time. The theory itself was evidence of a transitional ontology on behalf of Marxist-Leninist theorists: in a struggle between socialism and imperialism the balance of forces between the two would indicate the growing power of the former over time. The proto-socialist world was central to this change. The socialist world system was a slowly converging organisation of states that shared sovereignty. These often-disparate states were presented by GDR theorists as part of an extended *Heimat*, to which the proto-socialist world would produce and add new states as time progressed. Yet as evidenced in the case of Cuba, the same state that professed this view also othered and exoticised socialism in the proto-socialist world as something fundamentally different to the GDR.

Recognising the GDR's orientation to the proto-socialist world in the global context, depth, and in its historical ruptures and continuities, helps correct prevalent views within the literature that GDR was a closed, autarchic state, as well as related accounts of the GDR's engagement with the extra-European world that reduce them to cynical attempts

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to build domestic legitimacy. Instead, the present thesis proposes viewing the GDR as simultaneously open and closed. Proto-socialism had Manichean foundations, based as it was on the division of the world into two struggling camps. But within this dialectical world-view, theorists produced more complexity. A particular emphasis was on the notion of development paths: GDR authorities tried to transmit this idea to figures from the proto-socialist world with mixed success. The idea nevertheless remained prevalent, and found its way into the fields of leisure and entertainment.

The GDR's turn to the proto-socialist world was more than a legitimising tactic. Citizens within the state were expected to actively take part in it, as the practice of making solidarity donations illustrates. In doing so, GDR authorities drew the idea of the proto-socialist world into the domain of state-society relations and rather than acting as a diversion for what was an often strained and difficult relationship between regime and citizen, the attempt to build sovereignty at home through engagement with the proto-socialist world was shot through with conflict. Just as GDR foreign policy experts would later bemoan their lack of flexibility with regard to diversion and the acceptance of difference with their partners in the proto-socialist world, they displayed a similar demand for ideological conformity in domestic fields; emphasising collective, state-led internationalist practices in which individual impulses were discouraged.

The vision of a proto-socialist world was a fundamentally global one. But, in a globalising world, it was ultimately found wanting. The proto-socialist world was more complex than GDR elites had imagined: as students came to study in the GDR in the early 1960s revealed, objective anti-imperialism did not always mean what GDR elites wanted or imagined it to be. And in their own travel material, GDR authorities undermined the very developmentalist ideas at the heart of the notion of proto-socialism. The state's own citizens proved stubborn and independent-minded when it came to supporting the proto-socialist world. By the 1980s foreign policy elites were questioning the proto-socialist nature of the extra-European world. While this world still featured as an important reference point for entertainment in the 1980s, as it did in

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Treffpunkt Flughafen, the pessimism that had crept into this worldview was traceable in the show.

This thesis has made the case for a renewed understanding regarding the importance of the proto-socialist world to the GDR. It is not an exhaustive study of this link, but rather a plea for reorientation: an exploratory attempt to highlight new pathways in our understanding of both the global existence of the state and what it was like to live within it. By illustrating the importance of the proto-socialist world to five separate spheres of activity, it seeks to highlight the depth and scope of this connection. If successful, this kind of intervention will invite further avenues of research. Perhaps the most important of these would involve assessing the importance of the GDR's relationship to the proto-socialist world to its demise. If the central claim of this thesis—that GDR leaders saw the proto-socialist world as vital for the ongoing existence of their state—is correct, it would follow that the failure of socialism to develop in the extra-European world should, at the very least, be taken into account when thinking about the demise of the GDR. As we have seen, optimistic accounts of socialist development in the extra-European world were downgraded into pessimism in the 1980s. Did this failure play a role in the state's collapse at the end of the decade?

Answering such a question involves first taking into account the nature of the revolution itself, which most historians agree was marked by a conjuncture of long and short-term causes. Deep-set economic and political difficulties combined with contagion from upheavals across the Soviet bloc, which coloured the interplay between a rapidly mobilised protest movement in the streets and a ruling elite struggling to respond to events.⁶ Inherent in this mix is the notion of transnationalism: upheavals in each country were entangled parts of a broader whole, influenced by local events but interdependent

⁶ For this perspective see in particular Kevin McDermott and Matthew Stibbe, “The Collapse of Communism in Eastern Europe: Origins, Processes, Outcomes,” in *The 1989 Revolutions in Central and Eastern Europe: From Communism to Pluralism*, ed. Kevin McDermott and Matthew Stibbe (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

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upon one another.⁷ Scholarship on 1989 in the GDR, however, has tended to emphasise the “internal” rather than “external” factors in revolt.⁸

These perceptions are important to our understanding of the collapse of the GDR, for insofar as 1989–90 can be characterised as a revolution, it was as much a revolution “from above” as one “from below.” The interplay between “the masses” and the elites has been one of the great sources of scholarly attention since the *Wende*: the sudden development of a loosely organized opposition movement in the latter half of 1989 and its precipitous success in dismantling the regime is difficult to square with the GDR’s relative pacificity pre-1989.⁹ To foreign commentators, the GDR appeared the most stable of the “People’s Democracies” and its sudden decline has led to the conclusion that GDR elites must have experienced a drastic and sudden loss of conviction to power at some point in late 1989.¹⁰

This thesis is tethered to a particular analysis of authoritarianism (itself indebted, often without naming it, to theories of totalitarianism) as being inherently inflexible, subject to complete collapse once genuine reform takes hold in any part its body politic. Tony Judt typified this view: “partial reform or reform of one sector in isolation others

⁷ As an illustrative example of this approach see Gerd-Rainer Horn and Padraic Kenney, eds., *Transnational Moments of Change: Europe 1945, 1968, 1989* (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2004).

⁸ Peter Grieder, “‘When Your Neighbour Changes His Wallpaper’: The ‘Gorbachev Factor’ and the Collapse of the German Democratic Republic,” in *The 1989 Revolutions in Central and Eastern Europe*, ed. Kevin McDermott and Matthew Stibbe (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013), 73–92; Grieder cites the following texts as examples of the tendency: Jonathan Grix, *The Role of the Masses in the Collapse of the GDR* (London: St. Martin’s Press, 2000); Arvid Nelson, *Cold War Ecology: Forests, Farms, and People in the East German Landscape, 1945-1989* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008); Hannelore Horn, “Collapse from Internal Weakness: The GDR from October 1989 to March 1990,” in *German Unification: The Unexpected Challenge*, ed. Dieter Grosser (Oxford: Berg, 1992).

⁹ The one key exception to this, of course, was the revolt of 1953, which shook the party elite to its core. As Stasi boss Markus Wolf noted, they carried a fear of the ‘violence and hatred...in our midst’ from the Nazi era well into the postwar period. But this fear appeared to have the effect of locking the SED into welfarist policies that contributed simultaneously to the GDR’s relative quiescence and its indebtedness. Markus Wolf, *Memoirs Of A Spymaster: The Man Who Waged a Secret War Against the West* (London: Pimlico, 1998).

¹⁰ On this, see: Maier, *Dissolution*, xiv.

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was inherently contradictory...In an authoritarian system power is indivisible—relinquish it in part and you must eventually lose it all.”¹¹ The social movements that sprung up in the GDR in 1989 were not enough alone to topple the regime. Rather, as Stephen Kotkin and Jan Gross argue, for example, it was the regime that chose to topple itself: in the face of a fluid and changing situation, the elites refused to adapt and thus bowed out.¹²

What drove this refusal to adapt? Was the failure of revolution in the proto-socialist world a small, large, or even key factor? In his prison memoirs Erich Honecker spoke of the shifts in viewpoint that had occurred during the 1980s, claiming that they were “disorientating.”¹³ Were the increasingly grim outlooks on socialist development globally in the reports that were sent to him by GDR foreign policy experts a factor in this disorientation? As we have seen throughout this thesis, several members of GDR elites bemoaned their failure to grasp events in the extra-European world and mould them to the GDR’s advantage; is this just evidence of rose-tinted nostalgia, or something more serious? Of course, it is a common argument that once Gorbachev had renounced the use of force in the eastern bloc, the GDR’s collapse became a *fait accompli*. But that the GDR would disappear with so little blood shed was *not* a foregone conclusion—what role did the diminished hopes of the GDR elite play in this?

Another line of inquiry would involve examining legacies of the GDR’s turn to the proto-socialist world. Another key contention of this thesis is that the state, primarily through the means of the FDGB, sought to encourage the practice of socialist internationalism as part of its attempt to shape the new socialist human. What were the afterlives of this policy? Was the GDR successful in creating a German equivalent of Svetlana Alexievich’s *Homo Sovieticus*?¹⁴ The process of German unification, of

¹¹ Judt, *Postwar*, 603.

¹² Stephen Kotkin and Jan Gross, *Uncivil Society: 1989 and the Implosion of the Communist Establishment*, (New York: Modern Library, 2010).

¹³ Erich Honecker, *Moabiter Notizen* (Berlin: Edition Ost, 1994), 60.

¹⁴ Svetlana Alexievich, *Second-Hand Time* (London: Fitzcarraldo Editions, 2016), 23.

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course, would be a part of this story. In the newly unified Germany the period leading from 1989 through to the democratic elections held in East Germany in March 1990 and then to unification came to be known as the *Wende*, meaning “change” or “turning point” : the term was originally used by the West German publication *Der Spiegel* on 16 October 1989,¹⁵ although it came into common parlance following a speech made by the ill-fated reformist communist leader Egon Krenz on the occasion of his deposition of Erich Honecker two days after the Spiegel article had appeared.¹⁶ Krenz had, of course, not intended to predict the demise of the GDR, but used the term to indicate rejuvenation; this was a tactic the SED had used previously, signalling the parties “new course” policies of 1953 as a *Wende*, although the word was abandoned in the midst of the 1953 uprising.¹⁷

It is perhaps only a coincidence that *Wende* has a further temporal implication not often commented upon: it can imply a “return,” “reversal,” a “tack” in nautical terms, or a “volte face.” Or perhaps a further coincidence that this notion maps neatly onto Jürgen Habermas depiction of 1989 as a “rectifying revolution.... [characterised by its] total lack of ideas that are either innovative or orientated towards the future.”¹⁸ Whether or not 1989 created something novel or was simply a reversal is summarised by another linguistic controversy: a commonplace term for the events post-1989 is “*Wiedervereinigung*,” meaning “reunification,” as opposed to simply *Vereinigung*, or “unification.” But what exactly was the new federal state a return to?

These debates have by and large ignored the possibility of continuities as stemming from the political structures of the GDR itself. The *Wende* was either a “return” to a

¹⁵ “Ein Riß Durch Die Partei,” *Der Spiegel*, October 16, 1989, <http://www.spiegel.de/spiegel/print/d-13497940.html>.

¹⁶ “9. Tagung des Zentralkomitees der SED. Rede des Genossen Egon Krenz, Generalsekretär des Zentralkomitees der SED,” *Neues Deutschland*, 19.10.1989.

¹⁷ Horst Dieter Schlosser, *Die deutsche Sprache in der DDR zwischen Stalinismus und Demokratie* (Verlag Wissenschaft und Politik, 1990), 185.

¹⁸ Jürgen Habermas, “What Does Socialism Mean Today? The Rectifying Revolution and the Need for New Thinking on the Left,” *New Left Review* 183, no. 1995 (1990): 109–31.

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preset German liberal *Sonderweg* or from the viewpoints of some of its critics, a “colonisation,” in both readings a rupture with the past.¹⁹ As Martin Müller has argued, a tendency to privilege rupture over continuity has plagued the field of postsocialism studies.²⁰ What continuities can be read into the post-*Wende* life of the so-called *neuen Länder*? How did the attempt to make active internationalists out of socialist citizens resonate once it had disappeared?

It was in 1962 that Brigitte Reimann expressed her doubts regarding the fallibility of the German working classes in Hoyerswerda. Just under three decades later, and under a year since the establishment of a unified German state in October 1990, Hoyerswerda would erupt in a series of xenophobic riots directed primarily at Vietnamese and Mozambican former contract workers.²¹ Alongside similar events in Rostock a year later, the Hoyerswerda riots presented an apparently clear answer to anyone wondering if the GDR’s official stance of anti-racism had borne any effect on its populace. As the authors of an edited volume would later claim, the ethnonationalism on display in Hoyerswerda reflected the extent to which Marxism-Leninism in the GDR had become imbued with nationalist or even xenophobic tendencies.²² A further study on the riots by Christoph Wowtscherk located pre-*Wende* continuities in the growth of a neo-Nazi social movement in the late 1980s, and a lack of social cohesion within Hoyerswerda itself that

¹⁹ Oliver Das Gupta, “Wiedervereinigung oder Anschluss?,” *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, August 30, 2010, <https://www.sueddeutsche.de/politik/streit-um-deutsche-einheit-wiedervereinigung-oder-anschluss-1.993920>.

²⁰ Martin Müller, “Goodbye, Postsocialism!,” *Europe-Asia Studies* 71, no. 4 (April 21, 2019): 541.

²¹ The riots have been deemed serious enough by several authors to be described as pogroms. See K. Erik Franzen, “Erinnerung to Come, to Stay, to Go. Migration Im Städtischen Gedächtnis in Hoyerswerda Nach 1989: Eine Annäherung Am Beispiel Des „Lagers Elsterhorst,”” in *Migration Und Krieg Im Lokalen Gedächtnis: Beiträge Zur Städtischen Erinnerungskultur Zentraleuropas*, ed. K. Erik Franzen (Munich: Frank & Timme, 2018), 144.

²² Jan C Behrends, Thomas Lindenberger, and Patrice G Poutrus, *Fremde und Fremd-Sein in der DDR: zu historischen Ursachen der Fremdenfeindlichkeit in Ostdeutschland* (Berlin: Metropolis, 2003).

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was exacerbated by the collapse of the GDR.²³ The rise of the far-right in the former *Länder* of the GDR is one part of this story. But beyond this, there is also the story of the less dramatic afterlives of socialist internationalism: what happened when, almost from one day to another, the proto-socialist world disappeared from the GDR citizens' everyday experience. In 2019, 30 years after the fall of the wall, the far-right *Alternative für Deutschland* were able to record big gains in state elections in the former GDR heartlands of Brandenburg and Saxony with the campaign slogan *Vollende die Wende* (complete the Wende) suggesting that issues of rupture and continuity have not yet found consensus in the new federal Germany.

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DY 30 SED - Kreisleitung Fernsehen der DDR

DY 79 Gewerkschaftshochschule Bernau

DY 34 Bundesvorstand des FDGB.- Sekretariat

SgY Sammlung "Solidarität mit Namibia"

DY 34 Bundesvorstand des FDGB.- Büro Herbert Warnke

NY 4421//38 Nachlass Margarete Groh-Kummerlów

Bundesarchiv, Abteilung Deutsche Demokratische Republik

DC 204 Institut für Internationale Politik und Wirtschaft

DZ 8 Das Solidaritätskomitee der DDR

DC 20 Ministerrat der DDR

DM 1 Ministerium für Verkehrswesen

DR 117 VEB DEFA Studio für Spielfilme, Potsdam-Babelsberg

DR 8 Staatliches Komitee für Fernsehen

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Statement of impact

This thesis aims to offer a new perspective to the historical study of the GDR. In the process it will contribute both to our understanding of German history and global history more broadly. In reorienting GDR studies toward a more nuanced and in depth understanding of the GDR's relations with the extra-European world; this study will contribute to our understanding of global history during the Cold War and the interrelations that defined it. As part of the AHRC "Socialism goes Global" network, this thesis sought—to quote from the project's mission statement—to explore the “new linkages....between what were once called the ‘Second World’ (from the Soviet Union to the GDR) and the ‘Third World’ (from Latin America to Africa to Asia),” examining “their impacts on national, regional and global histories [which] have hitherto only played a marginal role in accounts of late 20th century globalization.”